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The Lost Art Of Cheating

ANDY McNAMARA
EDITOR-IN-CHIEF
andy@gameinformer.com

Read my column or comment on this letter at gameinformer.com/mag or follow @GI_AndyMc

I'll admit it. I miss cheating. I'm not talking about swindlers in online games with aimbots or lag switches, but the old-school cheating that didn't hurt anyone. Boosting done with cheat codes in single-player games.

If you played the original Contra back on the Nintendo Entertainment System, you knew its cheat code by heart (even though it debuted in Gradius). Up, Up, Down, Down, Left, Right, Left, Right, B, A was how you unlocked 30 lives.

Given Contra's difficulty, this code was how many beat and found love for a game that without the code may not have entertained so many. It was so important to Contra that the "Konami Code" has burrowed its way into pop culture, with t-shirts and appearances on websites everywhere.

In the race to make sure gamers keep their games, I think we have lost this very important part of video game culture. Not to say that I am against hard games or that cheat codes are for every game, but if you have a single-player game that features tons of bosses that impale players for hours on end, you might want to consider the sage advice Contra gave us all those years ago (I'm looking at you, Hyper Light Drifter). A cheat code can be how a player gets through your game.

I have many games in my collection that I loved playing and exploring, but never completed due to bosses I simply couldn't beat or I didn't find interesting enough to repeat the battle for hours until I was lucky enough to find victory. A cheat code would have changed that experience. It would have helped me tailor the experience to what I wanted from the game.

At the end of the day, that's what most games are about: having fun. If you worry the path of least resistance will lead to players blasting through your games, then hide it, old-school style, and release the codes months after a game's release. I would love to dust off some of the games that defeated me and throw on a bonus or two to kill the boss that gave me nightmares for weeks. To go back to having fun with games that literally drove me away.

Enjoy the issue.

Cheers,

40 Horizon Zero Dawn

After more than a decade working on the Killzone franchise, Guerrilla Games is shifting gears with Horizon Zero Dawn. The action/RPG takes you to a post-post-apocalyptic world where machines have taken over and humanity has regressed to a more primitive lifestyle. We get the lowdown on protagonist Aloy, how she'll survive in this dangerous landscape, and why Guerrilla Games felt this ambitious, challenging project was worth the risk.
by Kimberley Wallace

11 The Gamescom Report
Germany's massive annual gaming convention happened last month, and we were there to go hands-on with new games and report on all the announcements.

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Star Wars' gaming future is currently clouded. We have a list of what's in the works, and what we think is in the future.

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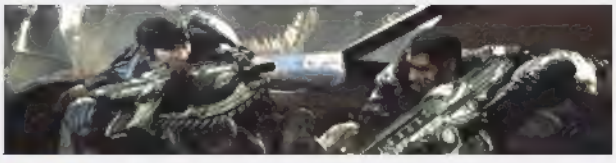
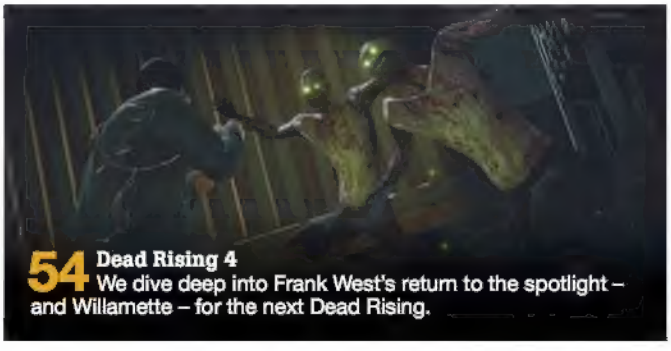


22 Long Distance Relationships And Gaming
Gaming is all about shared experiences, whether that refers to online games or playing offline games with others simultaneously, and we investigate how that factors into long-distance relationships.



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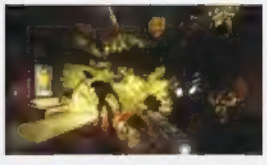
We dive deep into Frank West's return to the spotlight – and Willamette – for the next Dead Rising.



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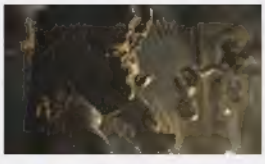
Arkane Studios' sort-of sequel to 2006's Prey is starting to get us very excited.



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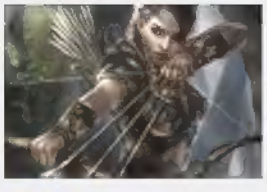
Capcom is changing things up for the next Resident Evil. We have the latest details.



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Bethesda takes on the digital card-game genre.

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We finally have our review of the immensely anticipated No Man's Sky.

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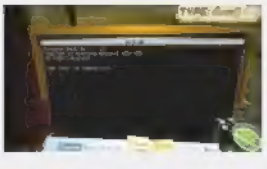
What's the verdict on Eidos Montreal's highly customizable sci-fi epic?



88 Quadrilateral Cowboy
This indie adventure about a group of thieves stole our hearts.

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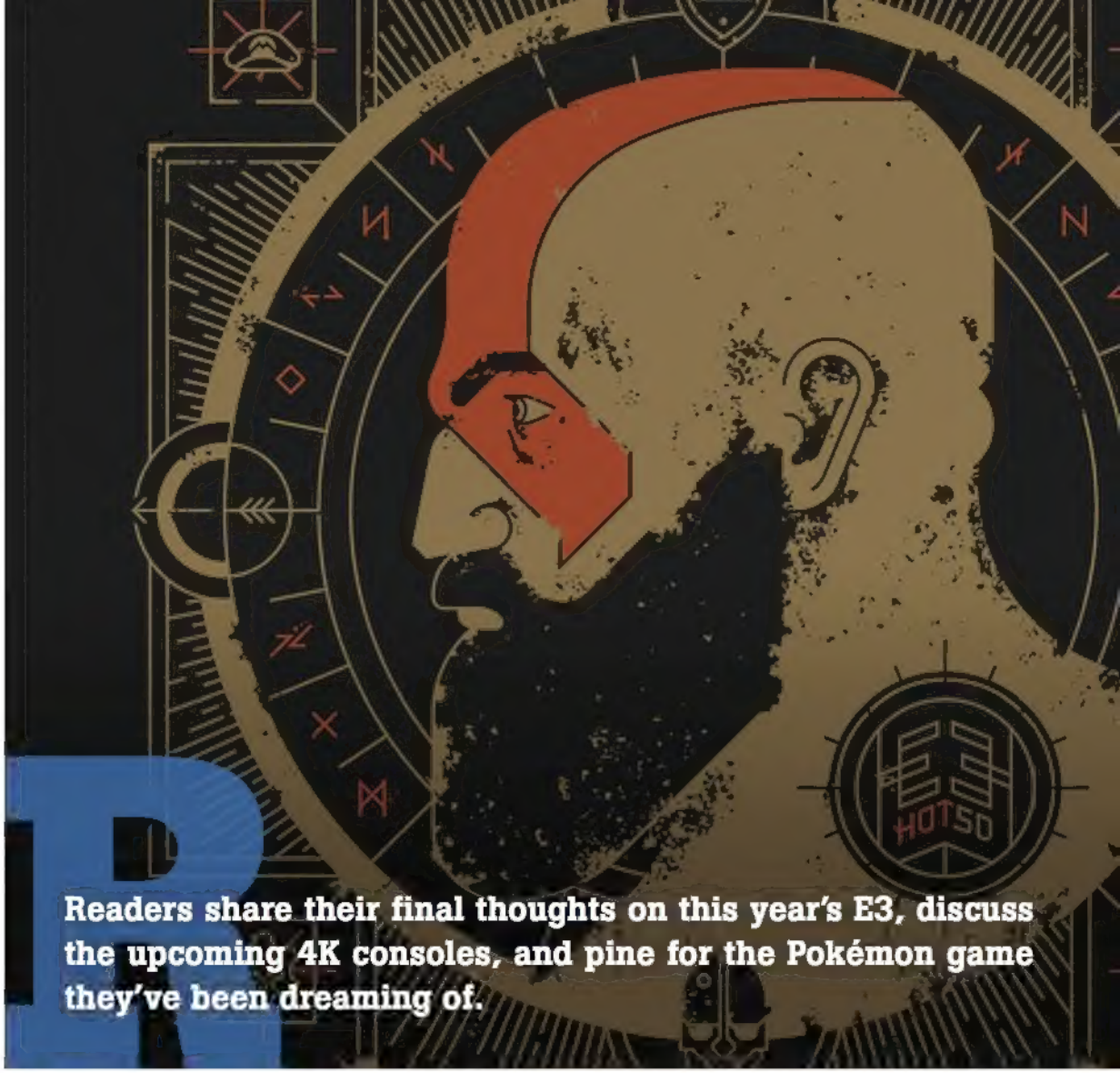


Readers share their final thoughts on this year's E3, discuss the upcoming 4K consoles, and pine for the Pokémon game they've been dreaming of.

Indie Appeal

I was very glad to see Microsoft and Sony continuing their indie efforts at E3. Releases from major developers seemed to dominate this year's show, while indie games faded back from the limelight. But it's great to see that indie development is still alive and well even if it's not at the forefront of the industry. Recent indies like Rocket League, Undertale, and Hyper Light Drifter have been nothing short of revolutionary, and it makes me very happy to know we'll continue to see games like these in the future.

Dominic Cobb
via email

While indie games didn't make quite as big of a splash at E3 2016 as in previous years, a number of promising titles still earned spots on our Hot 50 list. Thankfully, most indie developers don't wait to debut their games at a big (not to mention expensive) trade show. We'll keep bringing you the best of the best each and every issue.

Archiving The Old-School

As a person who has played most generations of games, I'm curious to know what is being done to both preserve and give people access to games of the past. E.T. for Atari is still regarded as the worst game around (I played and beat it), and Ms. Pac-Man is hailed as one of the best all-around games. How will today's generation of players ever get a chance to study these old games as they were and maybe see the evolution of digital gaming? Has there been any effort to create a library of sorts that provides universal, stable, and legal access to historical games?

Chris Kopf
Massachusetts

You're in luck, Chris. The Internet Archive has already begun the monumental task of preserving gaming's earliest offerings, from old DOS and arcade games to early consoles. To take a stroll down memory lane, just head to Archive.org.

Contact Us
feedback@gameinformer.com

Catch 'Em All On Consoles?

As an adult who spent his childhood playing Pokémon on Game Boys in the backseats of cars, I have always valued the "pocket" aspect of Nintendo's pocket monsters. As I grew older and the DS versions of the game lost my interest, however, I found myself still wanting to enjoy the series. I have always hoped that Game Freak would develop an open-world console game based in the Pokémon world. Across forums and when talking to other fans, this is something I feel everyone wants, yet Nintendo insists on sticking to its guns and only focusing on its handhelds. Why not satisfy a huge amount of gamers with a sandbox-style open-world RPG? It could even be an MMO or have a system for trading. We all grew up with Pokémon; Nintendo knows this, their wallets know this, so why do they disregard the idea?

Dakota McMillin
via email

Most developers would consider giving fans exactly what they want a no-brainer, but for better or worse, Nintendo has always set its own goals for its series and systems alike. However, don't give up hope just yet. If the immense overnight success of Pokémon Go doesn't convince Nintendo that a home console version of its monster-collecting RPG is a worthwhile endeavor, perhaps the rumors of NX being a console/handheld hybrid will finally give trainers the supersized Pokémon game of their dreams.

For The Love Of 4K

This is in response to Rocky Johnson's Feedback letter about Sony and Microsoft's upcoming 4K consoles (Not Looking For An Upgrade, issue 280). While it is your choice to not upgrade to 4K technology, you wouldn't have your "top-of-the-line" 1080p TV now if companies hadn't made the jump to HD tech back in the day. So while I agree it's a tactic to drive sales of 4K TVs, I'm fine with that. You must not have had the pleasure of seeing 4K in all its glory; it's absolutely amazing. I have a 4K television and I only get limited 4K programing. Once more of the public accepts this technology, prices will lower and more 4K entertainment will be available. So enjoy your 1080p TV. Once more buyers like myself give in to the 4K revolution and it's dirt cheap five years from now, you can write in and thank me.

Greg Carter
via email

Video games have long been a driving force for establishing new technologies, and we suspect 4K will be no different. Whether the majority of gamers will agree with Microsoft and Sony's timing is yet to be seen, but there will always be early adopters willing to blaze a trail for the rest of us.

Short Answers To Readers' Burning Questions:

"Are you ready to use the Wii U GamePad?"

No.

"Where do those of us who have good, nay, brilliant ideas for storylines or mechanics for games go?"

Programming school.

"Do you guys hate Sonic?"

No more than everyone else does at this point.

Worst Subject Line To A Feedback Letter:

"All hope and faith lost in game industry/critics"

Question Of The Month:

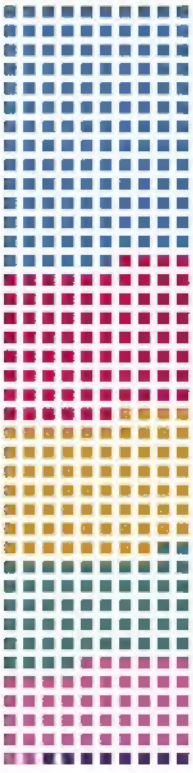
What game is your go-to time waster, and why?

gi spy

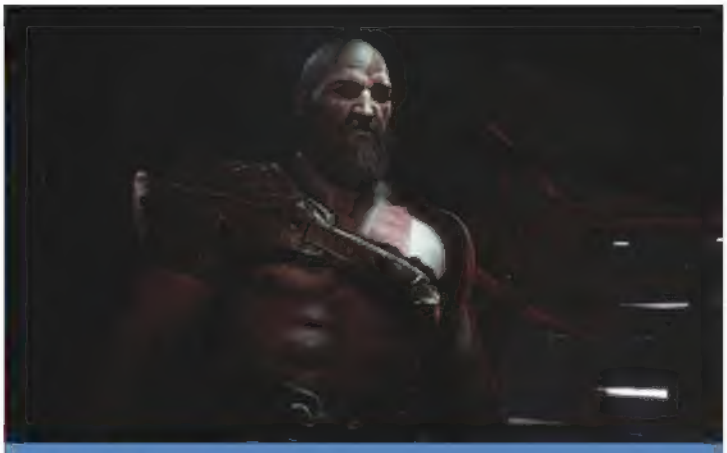
PHOTOS FROM THE VIDEO GAME INDUSTRY

(Left) The team leads at Guerilla Games were kind enough to show us more of Horizon: Zero Dawn this month. If you like robot dinosaurs, head to page 40. (Right) This month Reiner descended upon Gearbox with some industry friends. From left to right: Mikey Neumann, Scott Porter, Rick Malambri, Andrea Rene, Kristy Pitchford, Britanni Johnson, and Dave Oshry.

On Your Mind



- Post-E3 Analysis
- ".5" Console Hot Takes
- Indie Game Love
- Hot 50 Gripes
- NX Speculation
- More Merit Badge-Seeking Boy Scouts



E3 Aftermath

In issue 280, we asked readers what their biggest takeaway from this year's E3 was. While some question the future of the show itself, most were happy with what they saw from developers. Here are some of the responses.

My biggest takeaway from E3 was that games are alive and well. Sometimes you wouldn't think that from reading the constant negativity. As a PlayStation gamer, Sony showed a lot of games that have me excited for the coming years, and I look forward to experiencing them whether on my PS4 or the "Neo" if it is worth it.

Sam Caloras

Probably my biggest takeaway from this year's E3 is that the console makers are returning to the big developers. While indie games like Rocket League, No Man's Sky, and Below have fronted Sony and Microsoft's first-party lineups in the past couple years, it's my belief that major triple-A exclusives like Dead Rising, God of War, and The Legend of Zelda are swiftly rising back to prominence.

Darren Anderson

This E3 was interesting but you could tell that with EA, Nintendo, and Activision being mostly no-shows, the future of the show is in doubt. We will likely see changes to the structure moving forward, and I hope it's for the good of the medium.

Luis Emmanuel Morales Falcon

Mad About Madden

I found myself wondering something when looking through your previews section in issue 279: Why do you care to include the newest upcoming Madden game? One comes out every year with the same title with one digit changed. They typically have the same graphics for 2-3 years, the same teams, and very little added features per year. I feel it's a wasted space that could be used to feature any other game.

Matthew Snell
Vancouver, WA

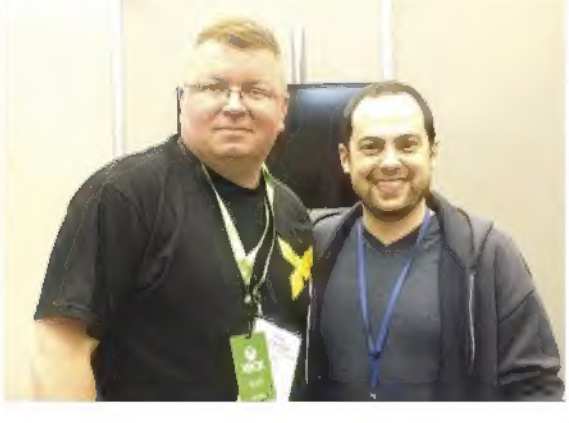
Not a football fan, are we? While Madden's annual offerings may not interest you, the series remains one of the biggest and best-selling franchises of the industry, with millions of fans who happily buy each new installment. And, believe it or not, quite a bit can change from one entry to the next, which sports fans can read about in our review on page 84.

Pint-Sized Picasso

I was pleased to see that in issue 280 you included artwork from a younger reader. I grew up during the first Nintendo generation as a gamer and inspiring artist. I have always compared my drawings to those of my peers that I've seen in magazines and elsewhere. Children these days should be able to feel just as connected as I did when I was younger, giving them hope that by submitting their artwork they could possibly be published in a magazine like yours. Please consider continuing to show these submissions.

Jesse Pagliano
via email

We mostly just shared Colin's art because we were tickled by the thought of a Star Wars/Mario mash-up, but we guess filling kids with hope and inspiration is cool too. For details on how to submit your art, flip to the Gallery on page 8.



(Left) Matt Bertz recently caught up with ArenaNet's Ron Burgess and Hidden Variable Studios' Nick Ahrens, who has been screaming ever since he left G.I.

(Right) Jeff Marchiafava's favorite E3 appointment? Eating burritos with Rich "Saint" Dickinson, former G.I. blogger extraordinaire who now works with Microsoft's Larry Hryb.

(continued on page 8)

A SHOWDOWN FOR SKIN SUPREMACY

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*Average vs. Quattro Titanium lube strip

gallery

1

WINNER

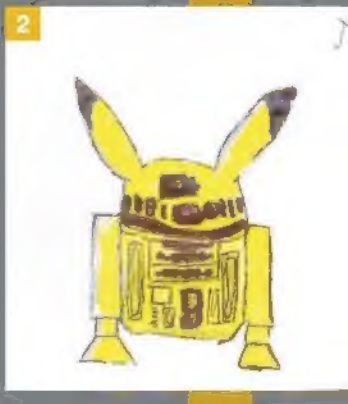
1 James Laws

We get a ton of Iron Man art, yet we still don't have a great game for this beloved hero

2 Jayden Zimmerman

If Disney ever acquired the Pokémon license, this terrifying hybrid would likely happen

2



3 Lee Baumann

A portrait of Link showing the intensity on his face as he watches an egg hatch in Pokémon Go

4 Emily Hall

League of Legends' Jinx is often confused as Harley Quinn. Maybe DC should have them team up in a new comic series

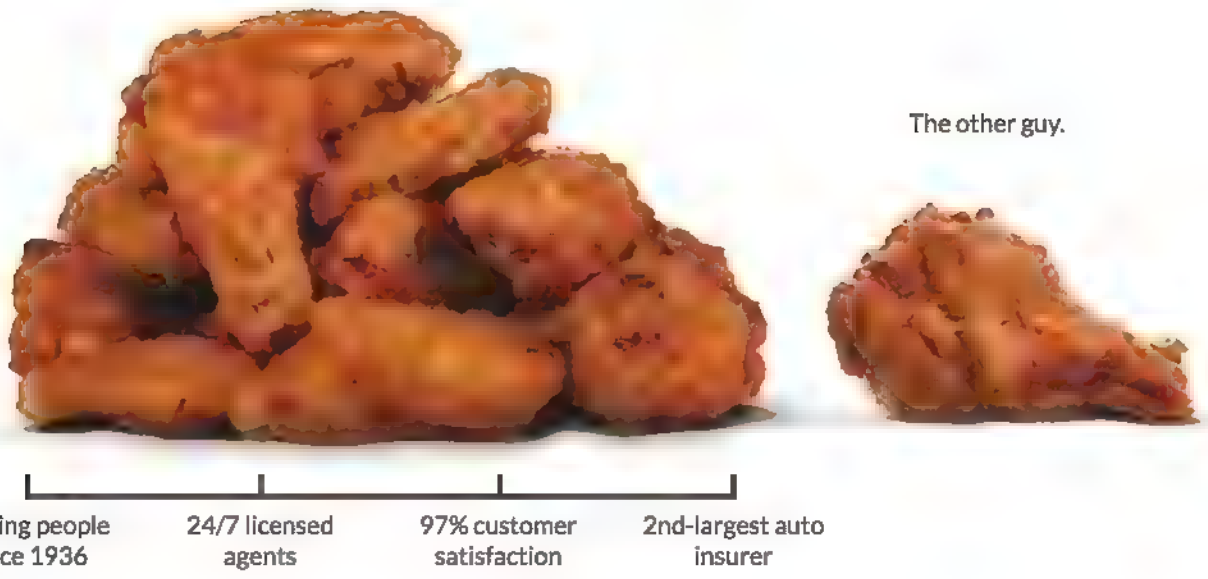
3

4

» Submit your art for a chance to win our monthly prize. Please include your name and return address. Entries become the property of Game Informer and cannot be returned. Send to: Game Informer Reader Art Contest, 724 First Street North, 3rd Floor, Minneapolis, MN 55401 | Email to: ReaderArt@gameinformer.com

(Left) This year at Comic-Con, Shea interviewed Bill Fagerbakke and Tom Kenny, who voice Patrick and Spongebob Squarepants in a certain cartoon. We forget the name of it. (Right) Shea also met Dan DiDio and Jim Lee of DC fame.

GEICO



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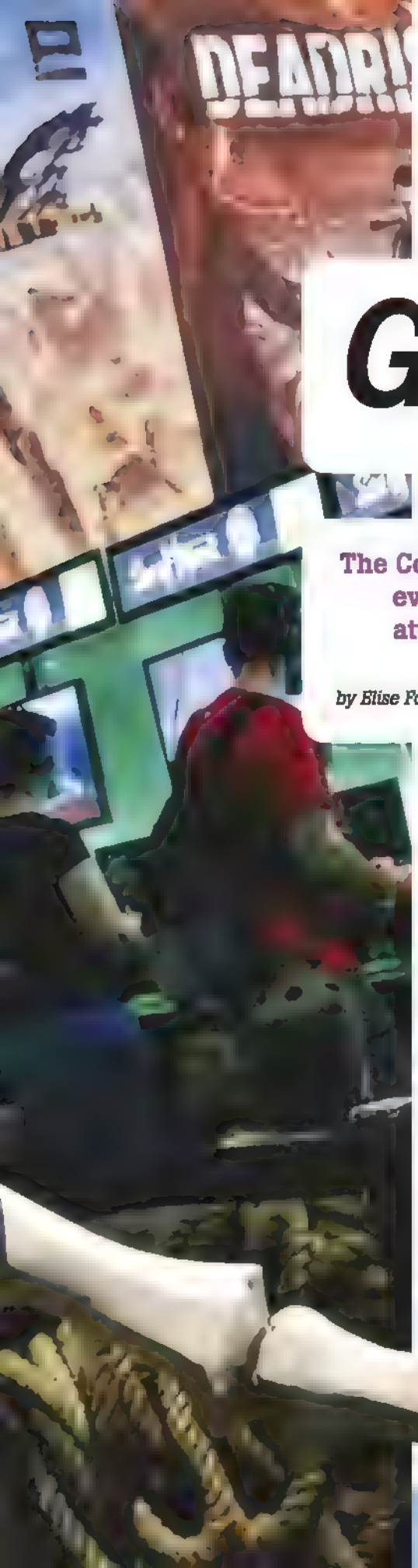


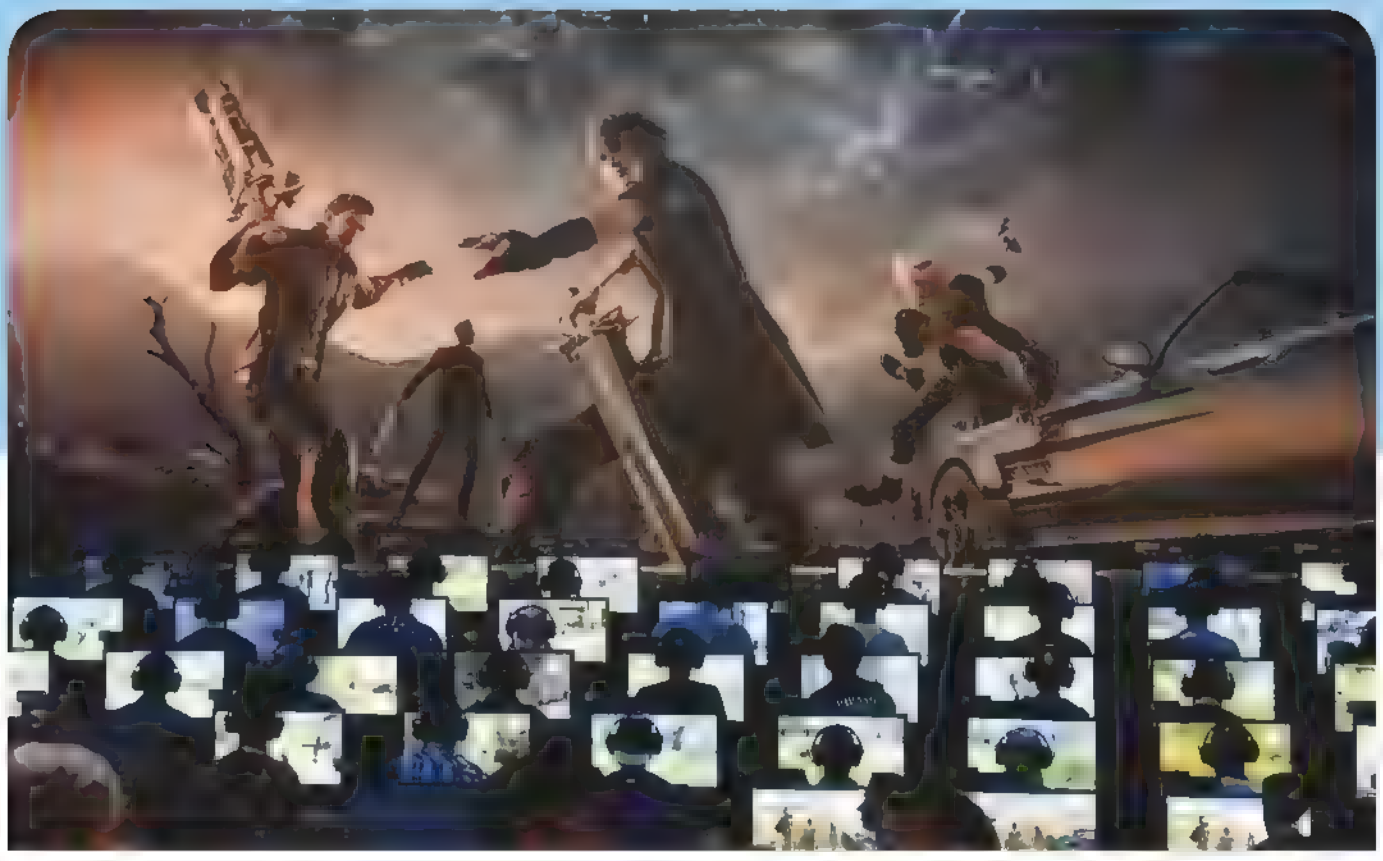
Gamescom 2016 Recap

The Cologne, Germany event sees highest attendance to date

by Elise Favis

The world's largest computer and games show hit record-breaking numbers with its attendance this year. Over the course of four days, the Gamescom public event drew enormous crowds of more than 500,000 attendees and 877 exhibitors from around the world — the most this consumer trade show has ever seen. However, even with hundreds of thousands of eager fans wandering the massive 11-hall Kölnmesse, there was considerably less hype. Unlike past years, Gamescom 2016 held no press conferences, and big announcements were few and far between.

With Microsoft, Nintendo, and Sony opting out of major presentations, most of the focus was put on demos and smaller announcements for games that were previously unveiled. Even with the anticipation and mystery surrounding PlayStation Neo, Project Scorpio, and the Nintendo NX, publishers held their cards close to their chests this year without divulging any more information about these upcoming consoles. It seems that the most significant announcements are shifting over to platform-specific events instead.



However, Microsoft's pre-Gamescom event allowed members of the press to try out demos before they hit the show floor, and began with a brief appearance from Xbox head Aaron Greenberg. Up on a small stage, he announced to the hordes of media that a new FIFA 17 Xbox One S bundle would release on September 22, with both 500 GB and 1TB hard drive versions.

Another big announcement from the show, which is arguably the most buzzed and controversial topic to surface, was the reveal of Metal Gear: Survive. Konami released its first trailer and later held behind-the-scenes presentations to the media. This four-player co-op title puts emphasis on survival over espionage, a drastic shift for the series that left many fans disappointed (turn to page 78 to learn more). However, with Konami remaining tight-lipped on details, it's difficult to say what else the publisher has in store for this title.

As for the show floor, fans huddled around booths and waited hours upon hours in line for hands-on with familiar titles such as Watch Dogs 2, Gears of War 4, Titanfall 2, Horizon Zero Dawn, and more. Gamescom awarded Nintendo's Legend of Zelda: Breath of the Wild as best of the show, and heralded Battlefield 1 as the most wanted consumer product. Ubisoft had one of the largest sections of hands-on experiences at the show, with For Honor, South Park: The Fractured But Whole, Watch Dogs 2, and Star Trek: Bridge Crew being among some of its best selections.

Virtual reality remained a highlight, with Oculus demoing its touch controllers for games like Crytek's The Climb, and PlayStation VR available for the public to try out. Star Wars: Battlefront VR showed promise with its demo that allows you to take control of an X-Wing.

Some of our favorite demos from the show included South Park: The Fractured But Whole, For Honor, Injustice 2, and Dead Rising 4 (read our six-page feature starting on page 54). We also got a hands-off look at some of Fall's biggest games. Dishonored 2 showcased protagonist Emily's phenomenal supernatural powers, and Mafia III showed the demo where Lincoln Clay sets off to New Bordeaux's downtown area to take down mob leader Tony DeRazio (which G.I. readers probably remember from our Mafia III cover story).

Capcom released a new trailer for Resident Evil 7 and we were treated to a behind-the-scenes presentation, which showcased a short demo where a young woman named Mia is being chased by a pursuer who holds a lantern. Unfortunately, with its predictable jump scares, the demo left us unimpressed (read more on page 64).

While Gamescom had some great offerings in terms of games, most were familiar titles and little from the show attracted major media attention. The event remains at its peak in terms of consumer interest, but major publisher presence was at an all-time low, shifting many announcements to other conventions throughout the year. ✥

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THE FUTURE OF STAR WARS GAMING

A look into the games on the horizon

by Andrew Reiner

On May 6, 2013, a month after LucasArts shuttered its development studio, Electronic Arts signed a deal with Disney to be the exclusive creator of Star Wars titles for the core gaming audience. At the time, EA seemed to have a timeline in mind, stating that DICE and Visceral Games would develop new Star Wars experiences using the Frostbite 3 engine.

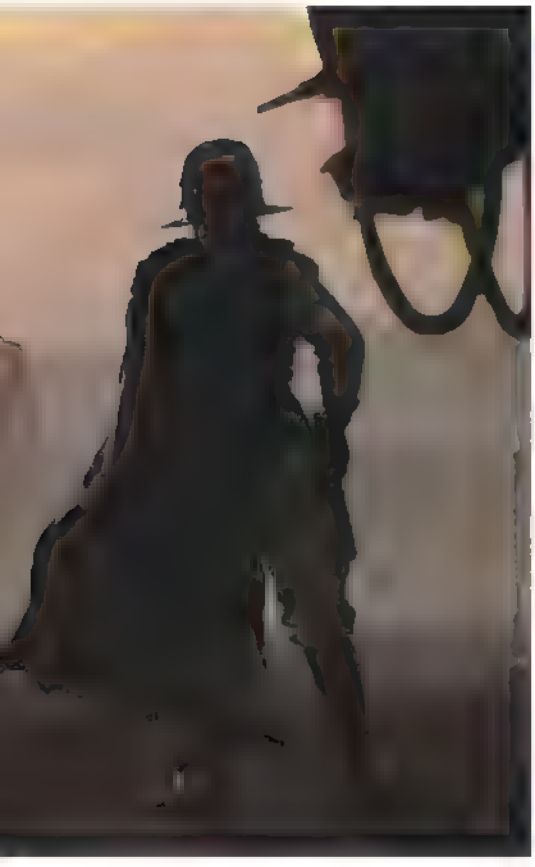
Games take time to develop, and we're just now starting to see the fruition of these efforts. Starting in 2017, Electronic Arts has a different Star Wars game launching each year, beginning with a new Battlefront title from DICE and Motive Studios, a new EA studio in Montreal that is co-developing the title and is rumored to be creating a story-based, single-player campaign for it.

In EA's E3 Star Wars video, behind-the-scenes Motive Studios footage shows concept art on a monitor that features a First Order TIE Fighter as well as Star Destroyers similar in shape to General Armitage Hux's *Finalizer*. We also see a Rebel X-Wing pilot rappelling with a rope down the side of a vessel with a gun drawn. Not only does this art hint at the new Battlefront being set in Star Wars' new timeline, but perhaps larger-scale battles that blend space combat and run-and-gun gameplay, much like early Pandemic Studios' entries in the series.

The next game in the pipeline is Visceral's untitled Star Wars title, slated tentatively as a 2018 release. From eight seconds of footage released at E3 and a handful of concept images shown at Star Wars Celebration, we know this game is set between the events of *Star Wars: Revenge of the Sith* and *Star Wars: The Force Awakens*, mostly from the design of the TIE Fighters. We also learned that Tatooine's Mos Eisley is one of its locations, but it doesn't appear to be a spaceport open to everyone, as we saw in *Star Wars: A New Hope*. From the Imperial banners draped across many of Mos Eisley's prominent structures, this city appears to be under their control. We also know that the Rebellion has a presence here, from a faint insignia spray painted on a wall, similar to the way Sabine Wren applies her tags in *Star Wars Rebels*.

The concept art hints at this adventure focusing on two characters, a male and female, who don't appear to be tied to the Rebellion, and instead are dressed like scoundrels. At Star Wars Celebration, Amy Hennig revealed Visceral's game wouldn't just be about one character.

"In Star Wars, there are co-protagonists," she said during in a panel at the show. "If you think about the original trilogy, or even the films that are continuing now, it's as much Han's, Leia's, Vader's story, as Luke's. Think about *Rebels*. That tradition continues there. Think about *Rogue One*. Same thing again. The same thing is true of our game. How do we honor that in story and do that through gameplay as well? It's not a lone-wolf story – that's not Star Wars. The characters have to be a coordinated ensemble, acting in the moment, and in parallel. Think about the Death Star escape. They only escape because they all worked in



The character in the footage is walking out of Mos Eisley's cantina. The pod on the left and the dish on the right are exactly the same

The Jedi that is shown in the footage appears to be a young male, no older than 13

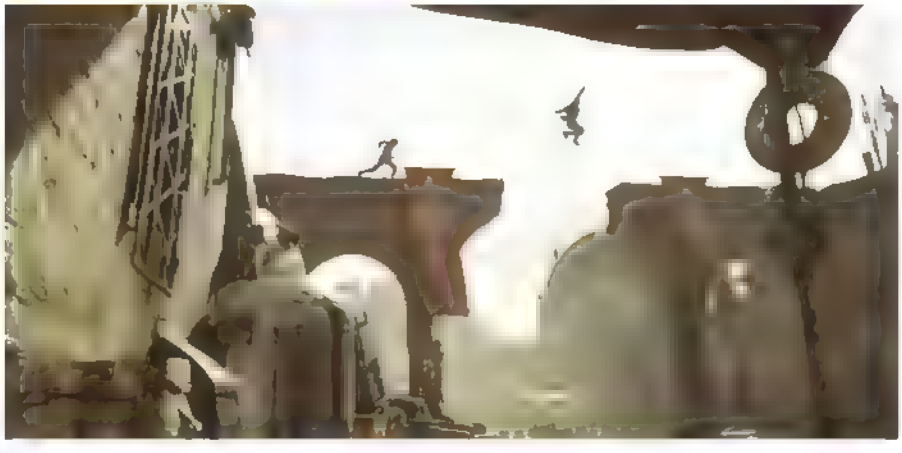
paralel They are always underdogs in these stories. They are always outnumbered and outgunned so they have to be smarter than their enemies, more improvisational, and they have to work together."

Hennig also revealed that this story would mostly focus on new characters to the Star Wars universe, and that the writing process for this game is similar to the work she did on Naughty Dog's Uncharted series.

After Visceral's game, possibly also in 2019, is Respawn Entertainment's Star Wars title directed by former God of War III lead Stig Asmussen, which he calls a third-person action/adventure title. We've seen motion-capture footage that strongly suggests the focus will be on Jedi action. The footage showed a young male (perhaps 10 to 13 years old) battling an older, bearded foe with a red lightsaber.

Along with Criterion's upcoming Star Wars Battlefront: X-Wing VR mission coming exclusively to PlayStation VR later this year, BioWare hinted at the possibility of a new Star Wars experience coming from The Old Republic developer. James Ohlen, the director of design at BioWare, says "beyond The Old Republic, there are so many stories that we want to tell."

Motive's Jade Raymond says more studios are slated to make Star Wars games in the years to come, but it appears the decade will close out with Battlefront II, an Uncharted-like action game from Visceral, and a Force-powered experience from Respawn. It's not a bad lineup, and it's nice to see EA formulating a long-term plan with yearly releases, much like Lucasfilm is doing with the movies.



The Ups And Downs Of Kingsglaive: Final Fantasy XV

With Final Fantasy's tradition of amazing cinematic sequences, the series' move into animated film seemed like a natural transition. So far, *Final Fantasy: The Spirits Within* and *Final Fantasy VII: Advent Children* faced different problems that kept them from being wholeheartedly embraced by the Final Fantasy community. With *Kingsglaive: Final Fantasy XV*, Square Enix takes another shot at bringing its flagship franchise into the movie world. This feature-length exploration of Final Fantasy XV's universe is rewarding for fans, and we take a look at what works (and what doesn't) in the film.

+ Up: Game Preparation
If you're already planning to play Final Fantasy XV, you should watch *Kingsglaive*. The movie takes place parallel to the early parts of the game, and is a window into the turmoil at home (the city of Insomnia) as players are on a road trip with the game's protagonist Noctis and his friends. It features several characters who play prominent roles in the game, and the connection feels more significant than any other spin-off media I've seen before.

- Down: Standalone Potential
When viewed as a limb of the larger Final Fantasy XV body, *Kingsglaive* is valuable. When viewed as a standalone movie, its appeal diminishes significantly. It is more accessible to non-fans than *Advent Children*, but it still doesn't cross the threshold into the realm of wide appeal. If you aren't already excited for Final Fantasy XV, you don't need to see *Kingsglaive*

+ Up: The Action
Kingsglaive has some great battles laced with impressive action that lives up to the Final Fantasy legacy. With enormous monsters, hijacked airships, and one-on-one duels, the movie doesn't give you much time to breathe. The focus on conflict allows Square Enix to highlight outstanding fight sequences, including slick teleportation moves and magic-infused attacks that come together in a stream of relentless and well-choreographed encounters.

- Down: Character Moments
The price you pay for the bevy of cool action scenes is you don't get much narrative downtime, leaving the cast without room to develop. Most of the characters are encompassed by simple archetypes, which doesn't allow for much nuance. King Regis alone gets the opportunity to shine, and I was especially disappointed with Luna; for all of the talk about the team's desire to make her a strong character, she doesn't seem to do much for herself. Hollywood voice talent Aaron Paul, Lena Headey, and Sean Bean do solid work in the leading parts, and the supporting voice cast is also good.

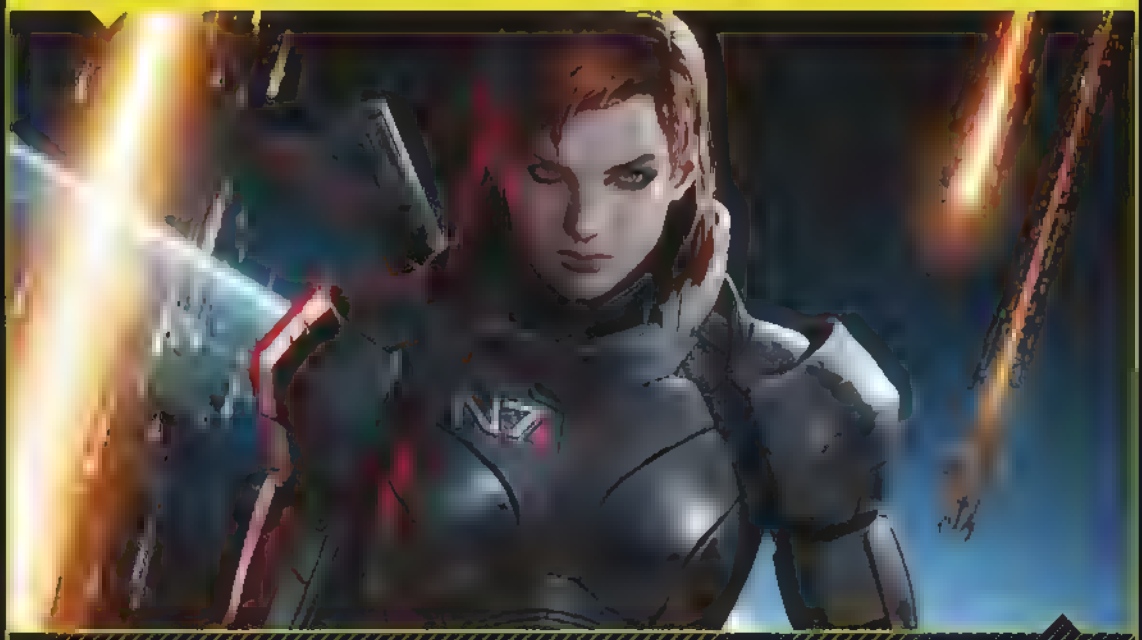
+ Up: Visuals
With cutting-edge tech and jaw-dropping effects, Kingsglaive is a gorgeous fragment of the Final Fantasy XV universe. The characters look lifelike, and their motion capture and animation is excellent. The various spells, weapons, and monsters make battles and other action sequences awe-inspiring affairs. Plus, the overall art direction is cohesive and stylish, making the city of Insomnia feel real while still retaining its fantasy elements. Regardless of the cracks that show in other aspects of the movie, it's always a visual treat.

- Down: Crowded Cast
The number of characters and their exploits are more than the movie can support in under two hours. With a few superfluous villains and allies, the tale feels unfocused; important story beats can't land with much impact if you can't keep the characters and their motivations straight. I wish the movie had trimmed down the roles, which would have freed up more time for the important characters to become interesting.

+ Up: Nods To Fans
To avoid spoilers, I won't go into much detail here, but *Kingsglaive* has several cool surprises for longtime fans of the franchise, like some familiar-looking monsters. This won't tip anyone's opinion on the movie one way or the other, but it's a treat for loyal Final Fantasy players.

Final Verdict
Despite issues with the characters and story, *Kingsglaive* is the best Final Fantasy movie yet. Square Enix has honed the art of flashy, acrobatic action, and that skill is on full display for most of the movie. The story takes a disappointing shape when viewing *Kingsglaive* as an isolated experience, but as a prelude to a much larger adventure on the horizon, it made me even more excited to watch this world come together – all while delivering plenty of thrills along the way.

The Good



THE MASS EFFECT TRILOGY may be getting the remaster treatment by Electronic Arts. "The honest answer is that we are absolutely actively looking at it," EA Studios executive vice president Patrick Soderlund told us at Gamescom. "I can't announce anything today, but you can expect us most likely to follow our fellow partners in Activision and other companies that have done this successfully." Soderlund went on to say how to approach releasing these remasters.

The Bad

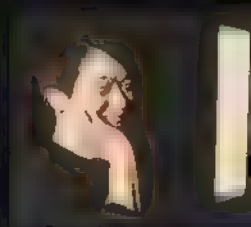
JOYCE WORLEY KATZ, one of the three founders of pioneering video game magazine *Electronic Games*, has passed away. Worley Katz, along with Arnie Katz and Bill Kunkel (all three pictured on the right), formed the magazine in 1981. Her contributions at the magazine and as a senior editor at other publications were important to video games journalism and the medium. We extend our condolences to her family and friends.

The Ugly

SONY is making a variety of recommendations for those using PlayStation VR, which comes out in October. The company says some games may need up to 60 square feet of clear space (roughly an 8 by 8-foot space that's similar to the one suggested by VR competitor the Vive) — particularly for experiences that require you to stand up and use the Move controllers. Speaking of which, the company slipped in that not only will some PSVR titles require the controller, but that you may want to buy new ones, since the internal batteries on older models could be failing.

Quotable

"Our objective with Final Fantasy XV was to deliver a Final Fantasy of the highest possible quality, to every single person who buys the game. We have completed the master version, but when it comes to that highest possible quality, we felt that we had not quite reached this standard yet."



– Final Fantasy XV director Hajime Tabata explains the game's delay to November 29.

From Gamer To Race Car Driver:

How one man overcame his disability, using video games to fulfill a dream

by Elise Favis

At seven years old, Nicolas Hamilton went to an empty parking lot with his father and hopped into a go-kart for a test run. His legs were weak because of his cerebral palsy, a disorder caused by abnormal brain development, affecting muscle and motor function. He strapped his feet tightly to the pedals to ensure they wouldn't slip, but even with this added measure, he soon spun out of control. The go-kart flipped over, falling down a six-foot ravine with Nicolas still inside.

From then on Hamilton's parents forbade him from any kind of racing. This didn't stop his need for speed, though, as he resorted to the next best thing: racing games. By honing his skills and competing in eSports tournaments, his hard work began paying off in unexpected ways. Soon, he was helping with game development for Project Cars and launching into a professional racing career. "I've always wanted to be in motorsports from a young age," Hamilton says. "I was born a racer."

Racing plays a large role in the Hamilton family's lives. Lewis Hamilton, Nicolas' older half-brother, is a three-time Formula One world champion. From watching his brother compete in various races each weekend, Nicolas' love for motorsports progressed from hobby to passion. But becoming a race-car driver always seemed more like a fantasy. "I always wanted to get into it, but I never thought it would be possible due to my condition with cerebral palsy," he says. "It wasn't really in the cards for me to race."

The Virtual Racer

Diagnosed at three years old, the doctors told his family he would never walk, let alone talk. When he was four, he underwent what he describes as a "life-changing" operation, which loosened up the muscles in his legs, and allowed him to regain some control. However, he was confined to a wheelchair for some of his early life.

Nowadays, he sees his condition less as an obstacle, and more as just part of his everyday grind. "It's like anything," he says. "Once you get used to one thing, it might start off as a challenge, but as you get used to it, it just becomes part of everyday life."

During his late teens, Nicolas discovered the world of simulation racing, which seemed like a reasonable substitution for his unlikely dream. His interest stemmed initially from Rock n' Roll Racing, a car-combat racing game, which he played on the Sega Genesis at the age of six. He later advanced to sim titles. "There weren't really simulation [racing] games at that time; they were more arcade games," he says. "I got seriously into [sim racing] when I got a demo for GTR, which was made by Simbin Studios."

The demo left such a strong impression on him that he went out to buy the full copy of GTR, along with a steering-wheel setup. Unable to use the pedals, he instead controlled the car's speed via button inputs. "I wasn't able to have fast enough reactions to brake and accelerate, so I learned a technique on the buttons to be able to be quick and compete," he says.

Following GTR, he played Race 07, a 2007 title from veterans of Simbin Studios, who formed to create Sector3. This was the game where Nicolas first delved into online competitive racing. "I got into being part of a community and started to race with the best drivers in the world in sim gaming," he says. After spending countless hours refining his skills and learning the ins and outs of sim racing games, he entered an eSports British Championship in 2009 and won, despite using a cheap £20 steering wheel.

"These people I was racing against had steering wheels that cost £500 to £1,000, and I had a £20 steering wheel, and I just stuck it on the end of my desk," he says. "It was so cheap that every time after a couple of months, the buttons would start to stick because I used it so much, because I had to accelerate and brake on them."

One night, during one of his online tournaments, his brother Lewis took the time to watch him play. Instantly impressed, Lewis suggested that he should race for real. Nicolas initially refused, telling his brother, "That's not possible, that's not going to happen." But after some prodding, he relented.

Shifting Gears

Once Hamilton hit the track, he zoomed faster than even the instructors at the Jonathan Palmer driving school. In the next three months, he was fulfilling his dream of entering the professional world of race-car driving. To do so, he uses a specially modified car with widened pedals and a hand clutch.

"My first ever test in a proper race car was only three weeks before my first race," he says.

In 2011, Hamilton competed in the Renault Clio Cup, driving for Total Control Racing. Despite coming in last, he amassed recognition from fans and followers. In 2013, he moved up to the European Touring Car Cup, and then competed in the British Touring Car Championship in 2015, making him the first disabled driver to take part.

His accomplishments didn't go unnoticed. In 2012, he landed a job with Slightly Mad Studios, a London-based racing-game studio that was developing the game Project Cars. After coming up with a concept for a game, Hamilton contacted a friend of his at Codemasters, who suggested he reach out to Slightly Mad Studios. "It wasn't anything to do with a job," he says. "He just said, 'If you want to get involved in it, I can introduce you.' I said yes and he gave me an introductory email, and it seemed like Slightly Mad already knew who I was. It was pretty bizarre, but it was an opportunity that I wouldn't turn down for the world."

Hamilton stepped in at Slightly Mad as their handling consultant, but his role became much more substantial. At the beginning, the studio asked him to play the game a few times to get a feel for it, then report back. Soon enough, however, he was directly involved with the conceptual side of development, changing aspects of the game. "Here we are, nearly four years later. I'm now working on Project Cars 2 and it's been a pretty phenomenal journey," he says. "Having learned that Slightly Mad actually started from SimBin Studios, which created the games that I grew up on and started my career with, it's as if it's almost meant to be."

Hamilton is not the first to hone his skills in games and eventually transition to behind the wheel of a race car. In 2011, Gran Turismo player Jann Mardenborough made the same jump, and others have done so as well. "I mean, I'm not the only person who's done it," he says. "So many people out there have. I'm just one of the unique individuals that have gotten an opportunity, was born with a condition, and sort of created my own path and my own way." He believes that racing games can be an impressive training tool for those that aspire to race for real.

Today, Hamilton continues to progress in the world of race-car driving, as well as develop Project Cars' sequel with Slightly Mad Studios. But most of all, he continues to inspire others with his indomitable courage, as he zooms down the race track in spite of his challenges.

Lead Lucky Hamilton consultant for Project CARS in 2012

Monstrous Transformations

Ganon

The Legend Of Zelda: Ocarina of Time

Ganon is one of the most iconic villains in games, popping up to harass various incarnations of Hyrule's golden boy. In Ocarina of Time, we see Ganon in his human form, Ganondorf, and his transformation in the final boss battle is still chilling to behold nearly 20 years later

Wander

Shadow of the Colossus

Wander undergoes a gradual transformation as he kills off more of the magnificent colossi. He slowly becomes a pale, horned demon, paying the price for killing the monsters and seeking to restore his companion Mono to life. Horrifying and heartbreaking.

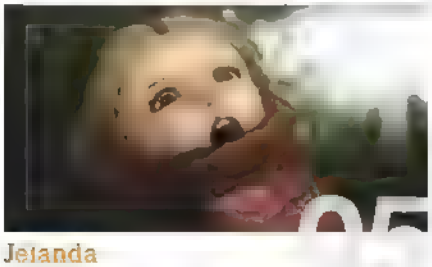
???

Inside is a nightmarish experience and one that's best left unspoiled, so we won't say anything beyond that the game does have a transformation, and it's disgusting enough that it will stick around in our minds a long time.

Franco Delille

Dead Space 2

Dead Space 2 opens with this guy's face exploding all over protagonist Isaac Clarke as he rapidly turns into a necromorph – a well-deserved fate for the star of the terrible Dead Space Ignition



Jelanda

Valkyrie Profile: Lenneth

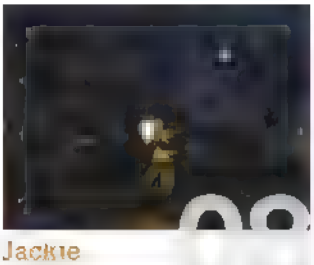
Jelanda appears to be a sweet, if somewhat spoiled, princess who's handy with a sorceress' staff. Eventually that facade falls away when she transforms into a monstrous, raging demon capable of crushing an entire platoon of armored knights.

Father Gascoigne

Early on in the game, Gascoigne is a temporary ally. Too bad you take him on in a boss fight soon after, during which he morphs into a werewolf with a transformation that includes the good Father exploding in a geyser of blood

Mendez

In a series filled with disgusting transformations, Resident Evil 4's Mendez, with his disgusting, tree trunk abdomen and gory pincers, easily takes the cake. The fact that you and him are in a confined space when he transforms makes the sequence even more terrifying



Jackie

Jackie Estacado is a mafia errand boy with a terrifying birthright passed down from his ancestors: the hitch-hiking entity known as the Darkness, which allows him to sprout deadly tentacles capable of ripping men in half, making him a force to be reckoned with

Devil Trigger Dante

Devil May Cry

One of Devil May Cry's coolest features is for protagonist Dante, as well as his brother Vergil and other characters, to transform into blazing, horrifying versions of themselves that increases their ferocity. Also, they look terrifying

Joker

Batman: Arkham Asylum

Arkham Asylum is filled with many unexpected turns. Chief among them is Joker guzzling Titan to become a giant, ogre-looking beast that lays the smackdown on Batman until Bats gets the upper hand, literally punching Joker in his crooked face with C4

photo: Dustin Seeler

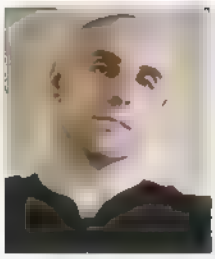


photo: Robert Paul

The Real American King Of Fighters

"Long Island" Joe Ciaramelli made an incredible run through the Evolution Championship Series tournament, placing fifth in Street Fighter V after an astounding victory over several players he's idolized for years. The tournament was broadcast on ESPN2, making him one of the most visible Street Fighter players in the world.

Joseph Ciaramelli

Occupation:
Retail manager

Twitter:
@thisislijoe

Location:
Long Island, NY

Interview by Suriel Vazquez

What was your first experience with video games?
I remember my brother and sister playing Atari, but then I have a lot stronger memories of my sister playing the original Zelda and my dad playing Castlevania. My dad used to love Castlevania, Punch-Out!!, and stuff like that.

When did you start getting competitive in fighting games?
When the original Mortal Kombat came to the mall, there were like 30 people around the game at all times. Ever since then I wanted to actually be good. I was like, "I don't know who these guys are, I don't care who these guys are, but I don't want to lose to them."

What is daily regimen for practice like?
If it's not for Evo, it's pretty casual. When a game first comes out, my friends and I grind super hard. And then things just usually start dying out. I have a career, so that takes up a lot of time. I had a girlfriend for a long time, so that took up a lot of time. I like music, I like going to shows. If there's a show, I'm going to the show on the weekend. I'm not playing on Friday when everyone else is home playing.

But if we're grinding out for an event, especially Evo, if I wasn't playing Street Fighter V, I was watching it or I was reading about it. I was looking at frame data, I was in training mode, and if I didn't have a lot of experience against Chun-Li, I was asking people online "who knows Chun-Li?" The last month-and-a-half before Evo, that's all I did.

How did you prepare for your first match of Top 8 at Evo?
I didn't really do much but calm myself down. I was extremely hyped – this was like a dream come true, being in the top eight players in the world at probably the most important time in fighting game history. But as far as the actual match, I didn't do much training that night. I didn't go out and do anything crazy. I went to sleep kind of early, ate some good food, and then I went to bed.

Before the event, you had a spinal-cord injury. What was it like to compete with something like that?
I had two bulging disks that were pinching my spinal cord, and it would send this pain down my right arm and into my hand. It would make my fingers and half of my hand numb. I couldn't sit up and play more than like five games before I had to go and lay down. I was popping meds at Evo. I never take medicine, but under those circumstances, I was like, "I definitely have to take this."

But I was more afraid of people making a big deal out of it. If you watch the finals, I shake my right hand a lot, so I started shaking both of my hands to cover it up. It was one of the worst experiences I've ever had to deal with.

Your dad also showed up unexpectedly. When you realized he was there, how did it affect your overall mental state and performance?
It actually didn't affect my mental state or performance or anything, but I was just like, "Wow, this is the guy who used to watch me play on milk crates at dirty 7/11s and pizza shops. Now he's watching me play on the biggest stage in the world . . . It was kind of like a complete circle. He was here then, and he's here now."

You also run your own event, East Coast Throwdown. How did that come about?
I bumped into a friend of mine at a local arcade where we were both playing Dance Dance Revolution. I got him into Street Fighter III: Third Strike and he was like, "I want to run events for this," so we started running events at this little place called Castle Golf back in 2009. It just kind of kept gradually getting bigger to the point where we couldn't do it at Castle Golf anymore. Now it's kind of huge.

MAKING A GO OF IT

How video games are keeping long-distance relationships alive

by Javy Gwaltney

In today's digital world, having a long-distance relationship and staying connected is easier than ever. Couples no longer have to wait extended periods without seeing each others' faces or knowing the thoughts of their significant other. Thanks to the rise of online and digital platforms in the last two decades, we're always connected to the world in some way. Electronic messages have replaced snail mail as the preferred method of communication, FaceTime and Skype have made phone calls more intimate, and social media allows us to get a glimpse into people's lives. Dating has also undergone a visible transformation, with Tinder and OkCupid becoming common avenues for people to find each other and form romantic relationships, replacing personal ads, group dating, blind dates, and hoping to run into your future partner by chance. Even certain video games, particularly those that stress the importance of online communities, have become matchmakers thanks to in-game chat systems. Believe it or not, gaming is emerging as a tool for countless couples around the globe to stay in touch and keep their relationships together in spite of the distance.

Amanda and Rich are just one of those couples. The two have been married for nearly four years. She lives in Maryland and he lives outside of Redding in the UK – that's 3,400 miles between the two of them. Except for a brief 10-month window when Amanda was in the UK, they have spent the entirety of their five-year relationship as a long-distance couple due to the their respective careers.

The couple, who met online in 2009, says they owe much of their relationship to video games. Both of them are self-proclaimed gamers, with Amanda bragging about playing the original shareware release of Doom. "I'm not quite that OG," Rich says somewhat sheepishly. "I jumped in during the PS1 era with Crash Bandicoot."

Now they use games as a way to spend time together and narrow the gap between them. "When we started dating, I bought my brother's Xbox 360 so we could play Borderlands," Amanda says. Now they're playing Overwatch together as much as they can, as well as Diablo III and Evolve. Occasionally, they also play through single-player games together, with one of them watching the other play the game through Skype, like Dead Space 3 and The Last of Us.

We heard dozens of stories of people using gaming in long-distance relationships as a way to bond just like Amanda and Rich do, but do couples that game together stay together? We investigated the different ways couples are using a beloved hobby like gaming to ease the hardship of a long-distance relationship.

Closing The Gap

In spite of their rising occurrence, the subject of long-distance relationships (LDRs) lacks any digestible, trustworthy source of statistics. The last study of note was conducted in 2005, with numbers that are woefully out of date by this point. The Center For The Study of Long Distance Relationships, perhaps one of the most exhaustive resources dedicated to studying couples miles apart, has since closed. The biggest and growing resource on the subject comes from those who have done the grind and offer their advice online, providing everything from tips to cautionary tales. Outside of that, people in long-distance relationships don't have much information available to them on the subject, which makes the professional resources that are out there invaluable.

Megan Bearce is a licensed marriage and health therapist who began researching long-distance relationships after her husband started commuting for work. She eventually wrote a book on this called *Super Commuter Couples: Staying Together When A Job Keeps You Apart* and continues to counsel long-distance couples. She says the evolution of digital technology has resulted in an increase in long-distance relationships as well as ways to maintain such a relationship. "Technology allows people job opportunities they wouldn't have had 20 years ago," she says. "But if you apply that to relationships, there's also like a million more ways to stay connected. One of the couples I interviewed actually has Skype dinners together. Obviously it's not the same as like reaching over and grabbing their hand or something, but it works for them; it helps them be together doing something that 'normal' couples do."

As far as video games are concerned, Bearce feels they have a lot of potential, especially as a tool to help long-distance couples manage their relationships. "I feel like games would be a good recommendation for therapists to throw into conversation, like, 'Is that something we can use to help you guys?' Games aren't on a lot of therapists' radar, and I think that's mostly because a lot of them are just behind on technology."

Harris O'Malley, a dating coach in geek culture who's written for *The Guardian*, *Slate*, and *Wired* under the alias Dr. Nerd Love, believes games are strong devices for building a sense of unity. "Long-distance relationships are difficult because there's a physical component that's missing that makes it hard for couples to feel connected sometimes. The thing that helps make couples make long-distance work is them knowing that there's going to be an endpoint where it quits being long-distance and becomes more in-person. When that's not a factor, then the best thing they can do is work on communication, visit each other whenever possible, and spend quality time with each other in whatever ways they can when not together. And gaming can actually be a valuable way of doing that."

Harris points to Portal 2 and other games that encourage co-op play as being strong tools that encourage team-building. A number of the couples we spoke to listed co-op games Destiny, Overwatch, and Final Fantasy XIV as their mainstays.

For Rich and Amanda, Borderlands has a special place in their relationship, giving them an experience they both enjoy sharing. In the video chat windows I view them through during our interview, they both start pointing to various deluxe editions of Borderlands in their respective rooms. There's an unexpected synchronization to their actions. The series clearly means a great deal to them and they talk about it a lot. "It basically acts like a surrogate when we don't want to use Skype or Facetime," Rich says. "We would just get on and play a game together and chat about what we had been doing during the day. It was great. It meant we could actually do something while chatting."

The Virtues Of Synchronicity

A hard part of a long-distance relationship can be feeling like you're missing out on doing things together. Alex and Naz, who have been dating seven months, have found that gaming together helps them alleviate some of this, making them feel closer, which is vital since right now the two are on separate continents.

Alex lives in Missouri and Naz lives in Istanbul. Both of them will be moving soon, but they still won't be in the same place. He's going to North Carolina and she's heading to Vancouver in Canada. "Same continent at least," Naz says in a way that suggests she repeats it often as a means of comfort.

The two were introduced to each other by a mutual friend during a session of Destiny. "We just ended up playing all night," Alex recalls. "Eventually I asked Naz if she wanted to be together."

After their moves are complete, the couple plan to fit their schedules together so they can see each other every month. When they can be together permanently is still up in the air. In the meantime, they find video games – the thing that brought them together – is what makes them feel not so far apart.

"We do a lot together with games," Alex says. "It feels like you're a lot closer when you're playing them because it's an interactive activity you can do with someone and it doesn't matter how far apart you are, but with voice chat and just interacting in the game together, it's like you're a lot closer than you actually are."

"Yeah," Naz says. "It's like," she pauses to formulate a thought. "For hopeless romantics, it's like in the old times when people would write letters to one another and be like, 'When we look at the moon, we see the same moon,' and now it's we can look at the same screen and do the same things and it just brings us closer together."

The two often play games, sign off, and then talk about them for hours on end. "We both play games because we both want to go into game development," Naz explains, "so whenever we've finished playing through a session of a game we'll talk about it for like two hours, just debating it, discussing how it can be improved."

The pair also branch outside of games in search of ways to spend time together online. "We've been working through *Brooklyn Nine-Nine* together," Alex says. "We'll watch episodes of that and stuff on YouTube and use third-party apps to make sure everything syncs up for both of us. Synchronization is important in games and shows and other stuff. [It] feels pretty important in a long-distance relationship because it helps sell that we're at the same place in whatever we're doing and it's not like we're doing the same thing separately, but we're doing the same thing together."

Carrying That Weight

Other couples go outside of video games, finding ways to make tabletop and card games an integral part of their relationship. Kat, who lives in London, spent a fair amount of time playing these with her ex-boyfriend, who lived in Washington, D.C. when they were together.

"We spent a lot of time on Skype sometimes playing Magic: The Gathering on Skype with physical cards or we'd chat over Xbox Live while we played different games. We also wrote letters back and forth. Very capital-r romantic of us. The distance was tough, but we were both really busy. Playing games made the distance easier to compartmentalize, I suppose. There was a designated time for us to be together; it was doing an activity in which we had a shared interest, and that worked for us."

Ultimately, the relationship didn't work out. "We tried to keep it up, but the combination of the time difference and all the work I suddenly had, and all the people I was meeting...eventually it made playing games together feel like this chore that we had to do to maintain something that didn't feel like part of our normal lives anymore. Trying to fit in time to talk to each other – in-game or out of game – just stopped being fun. Nothing matched up; it felt so dissonant, and we were worlds away."

Like other romantic relationships, sometimes long-distance just doesn't last no matter how much passion or effort there is behind it initially. According to Bearce, technology can actually damage these relationships just as much as it can help. "A lot of the time people can't disconnect fully or quickly, so if you and your partner are on together and you're too busy updating your status or checking your email or playing Pokémon Go that can cause issues, and sometimes context or nuance can be misinterpreted in text so it's easier to get into fights."

Kat still occasionally finds traces of the end of her relationship in the games she plays. The two had started playing Borderlands 2 before they broke up. "I still haven't gone back to play it," she says, "or any of the other games in the Borderlands series – it's just too weird for me now. I'm generally a completionist, but I left the game in this fairly fractured state, and I can't return to it, since the entire geography of the game is one we started on together. It sounds kind of dumb, but I still feel the weight of that save file."

The Waiting Game

Not all relationships have the same goals. Some people are happy to be together under whatever circumstances they can afford as long as that unified emotional crux is there. However, the vast majority of couples we spoke to do want to be geographically close one day. For Amanda and Rich, when that day may be isn't clear.

"It's... challenging," Rich admits, the ever present cheer in his voice suddenly giving way to weariness. "But at this point, I've done it so much; it's part of my day-to-day life that I don't want to be part of my life. I just want to be with Amanda, but at the moment it's challenging, and you just have to get on and do it."

Amanda nods in agreement with the sentiment but cracks a joke to keep things from getting dour. "Can you write about how I have to carry him through Overwatch? He's really bad at it." Rich sighs and hangs his head in admission. Self-deprecation and humor are clearly just as much of the glue holding their relationship together as video games.

Some may find a relationship like Amanda and Rich's or Alex and Naz's baffling. How can two people subject themselves to that kind of separation? Bearce believes every relationship is a unique machine with its own rhythm and logic. "There's so many variations on how these people live this lifestyle – whether you travel two days a week or live apart six months at a time – which I think lends itself to an overarching message of, 'Do what you do as long as it works best for you,' since there's no one right way to keep a relationship afloat. And it's okay to change it as well, so what might work this month might not work several months down the road, you're really just giving yourself permission to create the relationship that works best for you."

Like Amanda and Rich, countless couples around the world are trying to reach a point where they can be together in the same place and build a life. Until then they rely on whatever tools they have to keep things stable, and for many of them, video games are there to do their part in helping provide some light during the darkest parts of that long, arduous journey to stability and happiness.

Love Games

In search of some games to play with your better half? Here are a few fantastic co-op titles that value teamwork and can be played online.

Portal 2 – Portal 2's co-op mode is unique because it's not a retreading of the single-player mode with multiplayer shoehorned in, but instead its own mini-campaign requiring players to work together to solve puzzles and progress. Also, the robots you play as are adorable.

Rocket League – Last year's surprise sports hit Rocket League captured the interest of players everywhere with its goofy take on soccer and its frantic energy. Playing a few matches against each other makes for a good time.

Borderlands 2 – Shoot and loot. Borderlands has always shined as a co-op experience, and that's best exemplified in the second game, where you travel across a dangerous planet to stop a mad, masked CEO. As far as date nights go, you could do worse than saving the world with your partner at your side.

World of Warcraft – Beyond being a great way to meet possible romantic partners, World of Warcraft presents a classic, engaging world with plenty of activities to keep folks in long-distance relationships busy when they need a game to play.

Gears of War Remastered – For those who like their shooters grim with biceps stacked on top of biceps, Gears of War is the ultimate game. Want an evening where you and your partner feel like stars in an action movie? Make co-op campaign your go-to.

THE GAMES OF GEN CON 2016

Gen Con is the E3 of the tabletop world and these are the hottest titles from this year's show

by Matt Miller

For tabletop enthusiasts, August is a time of celebration thanks to Gen Con, the largest hobby games convention in North America. Each year the event brings a bevy of new releases, announcements, and most importantly, opportunities to get together and play games. The massive convention in Indianapolis has blossomed from its original incarnation in 1968, when it was established by D&D co-creator Gary Gygax as a wargaming get-together.

Today, tabletop-gaming companies from around the world gather to show off their best. "Publishers love to launch games at Gen Con, and that is nothing new," says Gen Con vice president of business development Scott Elliott. "It's fair to say that Gen Con has been the launch pad for gaming for almost half a century. The modern games industry — digital, paper, and otherwise, is filled by people who grew up playing face-to-face games, and many of those games and game companies got their starts at Gen Con. With the increase in crossovers and ports between digital and tabletop gaming, Gen Con attendees see innovations that others have to wait to experience."

Hundreds of games are showcased at the event, but here are the hottest titles that garnered buzz this year. All the games here are out now or targeting public release in the next few months, so you can start planning your end-of-year gaming options.

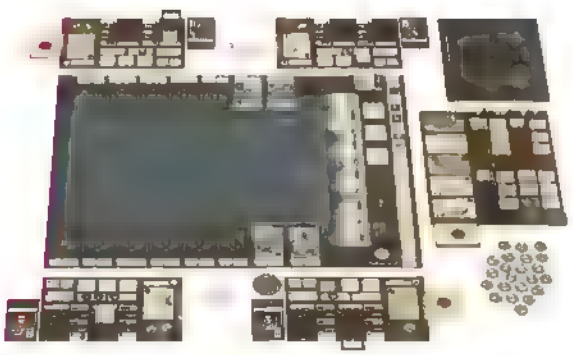
Junk Art

Publisher: Pretzel Games
Designer: Jay Cormier and Sen-Foong Lim

If you have fond memories of block stacking as a kid, or you're looking to pass on that fun to a new generation of builders, Junk Art is worth checking out. This two- to six-player building game centers on creating structures with oddly shaped pieces, and gathering fans for your eclectic art installation.

Junk Art is all about slowly building up your stacked junk art from over 60 included wooden pieces of various sizes and shapes, represented during selection by matching cards. Identical color, tallest structure, or number of included pieces in your structure might all contribute to gaining fans, but the specific objective varies thanks to multiple game modes.

"As we developed the game, it became challenging to find the base game because there were so many variants to choose from," says co-designer Jay Cormier. "Fortunately, the game was picked up by Pretzel Games and they too saw the value in the multiple variants and decided to make that a core element of the game."



SeaFall

Publisher: Plaid Hat Games
Designer: Rob Daviau

Legacy games have been all the rage in recent years, allowing not only an ongoing experience that carries over between sessions, but shifting rules, game-board elements, and storylines that permanently alter the game and its world. Designer Rob Daviau is largely responsible for the design innovation, and SeaFall is the first of his legacy games to be based on an original world of his own.

Players control a seafaring province as it spreads its influence across the oceans, raiding, trading, and expanding. The adventure sees three to five players competing for greatness on the high seas, with the ultimate goal of finding the island at the end of the world and becoming emperor. Across the campaign, you track major milestones on a historical record on the back of the rulebook, add new details to the rulebook, and cards can be torn up and destroyed.

"SeaFall is an epic game of adventure, discovery, raiding, and civilization," Daviau says. "Kind of an Indiana Jones in the 17th century. It's a game I designed for my 12-year-old self, as I was an avid D&D player, and this sense of adventure is what got me into gaming in the first place."

Codenames: Pictures

Publisher: Czech Games Edition
Designer: Vlaada Chvátil

One of my favorite games from last year was Codenames, a brilliant and engaging party game about words, meanings, and teamwork in which competing teams each try to guess the correct word cards as hinted at by their team's "spymaster." I'm not the only one who likes it; the game recently won the coveted Spiel des Jahres award.

That game's follow-up made a splash at this year's show, maintaining the focus on spycraft, but shifting from word-based cards to picture cards. Each of the illustrations combines multiple elements, and can be interpreted and described in multiple ways, like a knight carrying a broomstick or a flying piggy bank.

"Pictures work differently in the game than words, because they tap into a different part of the human imagination," says designer Vlaada Chvátil. "Some people prefer to play with words and find hidden meanings and links. With pictures, it's often more about the effect on the senses. Both have logical connections."

Potion Explosion

Publisher: Cool Mini or Not
Designer: Stefano Castelli, Andrea Crespi, and Lorenzo Silva

This colorful and tactile game offers some visually arresting components and an intriguing gameplay loop, with thematic nods to everything from Harry Potter to match-three video games. It's built for two to four players to tackle in an hour, making it an ideal choice for a quick game night with the family.

Players pour marbles into a dispensary – a slanted container with indents to hold columns of marbles – and then take turns snatching ingredients out to concoct designated potion recipes for their potions exam final. When the removal of a marble causes other like-colored marbles to click together, there's an explosion that lets you grab those marbles as well. Completing potions provides points toward the win, but you can also drink your concoctions for a chance to grab even more ingredients, depending on that potion's effect.

The colorful components, innovative gameplay, and quick play time make this one of the most unusual but exciting projects from the show.

Game Of Thrones: The Iron Throne

Publisher: Fantasy Flight Games
Designer: Bill Eberle, Justin Kemppainnen, Greg Olotka, Peter Olotka

If you've been starving for the vengeful machinations of Westeros since the last TV season ended, The Iron Throne may be the game for you. It borrows heavily from the gameplay concepts established by another excellent game, Cosmic Encounter. In this new iteration on the design, three- to five-players jostle for power as the leaders of the five great houses in the *Game of Thrones* show.

On each turn, two players encounter one another, but the other players at the table can scheme, ally, and betray either of the active players. The Tyrells can offer support to the Starks, only to pull it at the last minute to ally with the Lannisters. Truces form, but may only hold so long as both sides can find an advantage.

Each of the five houses has its own collection of heroic characters, like Tyrion and Arya. In any given game, players choose which character leads the house, lending a unique power. A deck of house cards also brings your other major characters into play during encounters to sway the balance of power. Ultimately, your goal is to spread influence over Westeros, politics and claim the Iron Throne.

Hit Z Road

Publisher: Space Cowboys
Designer: Martin Wallace

The new game from Martin Wallace (Age of Steam, Runebound) embraces a mash-up theme, taking classic Americana influences and old-school board-game aesthetics, and layering on the horror and brutality of a zombie apocalypse. The result shines with originality, even in the crowded genre of zombie games.

Using components that look like repurposed bottle caps and poker chips, the game is about a westward-bound road trip along Route 66. Instead of an innocent and non-violent race to the Pacific Coast, an ever-growing horde of zombies is constantly nipping at your heels.

Different routes present themselves, and random cards placed along each path can be easy to surmount, or offer thoroughly lethal challenges. Players bid on first access to the desirable routes, but in doing so, give away tokens for valuable resources like bullets and gas. From there, it's all about surviving the varied encounters along the way, zipping past the walking dead if you have the fuel to do so, or holding the line with your paltry supply of bullets by rolling combat dice and accepting the outcome.

GAME OF DEATH

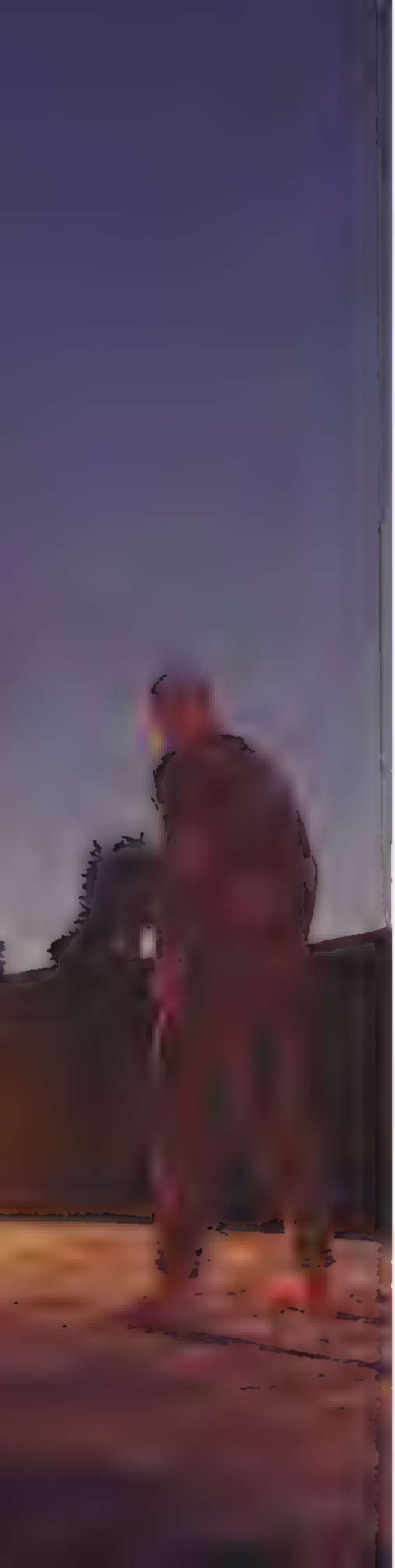
To survive in the crowded survival game genre, developers are forced to adapt

by Daniel Tack

Our species' fascination with survival and death has echoed throughout history, from the gladiatorial battles in ancient Rome to literary masterpieces like *Lord of the Flies*. The theme is more pervasive than ever in modern pop culture, with television shows like *Lost*, reality competitions like *Survivor*, and adapted films like *The Hunger Games* and *The Maze Runner* dominating watercooler conversations over the past decade. Whatever the setting, we are riveted by tales of overcoming the odds when the reaper is closing in, especially against what can often be our greatest foe: other humans.

This fascination extends to video games as well. While the theme of surviving against all odds is nothing new, the rise in popularity of titles like Minecraft and DayZ have essentially created a new dedicated genre that allows gamers to test their own survival skills with and against other players. These types of games present players with adversity and danger, often forcing them to cobble together a makeshift arsenal, defend their base from enemy assault, or just avoid succumbing to the elements and starving to death. The inherent drama has proven to be a hit with players and viewers, with many survival games rising to the top of Steam sales charts and becoming popular on streaming sites like Twitch and YouTube.

But to survive in this increasingly competitive space, you must evolve. The latest rush of games in the genre, many of which are still in early access, continue to iterate and mutate to stay fresh. They expand with novel focuses on competition, battling against the elements, and building a larger gaming experience on top of the survival concept.



Rust

Developers Dig Deep For Answers

The reasons why players flock to survival games are as diverse and varied as the games themselves. Perhaps you like building up a base with your friends and playing fort, defending it against the great unknown and other players. Maybe you enjoy being a notorious killer, bent on deceiving and destroying other players attempting to survive under the cover of darkness. Or maybe you're tired of titles that hold your hand from start to finish and want to explore and endure in a freeform world. Whatever the reason, developers have begun to take advantage of the genre's freedom by providing the canvas for stories to play out.

"Survival games are part of a larger trend toward games with emergent gameplay mechanics that reward player creativity," says Studio Wildcard co-founder and Ark: Survival Evolved lead designer Jeremy Stieglitz. "You can see this trend affecting games as diverse as Grand Theft Auto and Shadow of Mordor. The survival genre combines such open-world emergent gameplay mechanics with online multiplayer and the 'city-building' of Minecraft with addictive results."

The Facepunch Studios boss and famed creator of PC classic Garry's Mod, Garry Newman, thinks the genre's success has been in relation to the current gaming climate. "A lot of [the popularity in survival games] is the lack of challenge in more popular games," he says. "Single-player games in particular have become a real bore – with very little risk of actually losing, or being punished for being bad. Survival games swing the pendulum the complete other way – and that's refreshing for people. It means that when you actually do well you get a real feeling of accomplishment."

In addition, players are getting hooked by the interesting stories they can tell about how they survived the worst of odds, requiring them to think on their feet. Making something out of nothing is a fun progression loop. "I feel a lot of the charm of the survival genre is the emergent stories that come up," says Don't Starve Together developer Jason Dreger. "Especially the ones that force the players to adapt. It's very satisfying to be faced with a problem and on the fly come up with a solution and have it work. But sometimes the failures are equally memorable and funny to talk about. For the streaming community, the hilarious failures are probably more responsible for raising the popularity than the successes. I think there's a lot of *schadenfreude* in watching Twitch streams."

It's Dangerous To Go Alone

A smattering of titles focus solely on the single-player survival experience – one against the world and all its often dangerous inhabitants. Games like The Flame in the Flood, The Long Dark, and Don't Starve proved there is a willing audience of people willing to go it alone.

Klei's Don't Starve has less tutorial or initiation than many other survival titles, leaving the player to deal with horrifying tall birds, flame-wand accidents, and hungry hounds through some trial and error. It's easy to die, but hopefully you're always learning something to bring to your next attempt. Don't Starve forces players to contend with a season cycle as well, so even if you create a sustainable setup and pristine base, the death chill of winter can kill you quickly as food becomes scarce – even just heading a screen or two away from camp can drain you to nothing.

"I like that Don't Starve did away with almost any guidance," Dreger says. "There are no quests or achievements to dictate how you should play. There's even very little in the way of a tutorial. It's really up to the player to choose their direction."

As players have tinkered with the best ways to survive alone, Klei added to the experience by allowing friends to come along on the difficult journey of sustainability. "Don't Starve was not intended to be a multiplayer experience," Dreger says. "The concept was always about being alone and vulnerable in a strange and hostile place. But there was a huge demand for being able to be vulnerable and alone with friends. Once the original game was launched, we looked at the feasibility of it and put in some work to solve the tech issues. In the end it required rewrite of a large part of the code."

With games like Don't Starve, sometimes watching other players fail over and over on a stream can be more entertaining than getting in the trenches yourself and being mercilessly pummeled by a tree monster after attempting to gather some wood for a fire.

Shuffling Away From The Shambling Dead

While the medium's mainstays often feature zombies in a post-apocalyptic scenario as the impetus to get players murdering each other for berries and discarded dog food, others are going completely wild with demolition and dinosaurs. Studio Wildcard's Ark: Survival Evolved is representative of some new shifts in the survival setting.

Simply existing in a world where the dinosaurs stand in for the shambling dead wouldn't necessarily be exciting, but Ark adds other features like taming, riding, and breeding dinosaurs to keep players interested long after they've managed to prepare meals reliably and created sturdy fortresses. As is the case with most survival games, the craziest things happen when players take hold of the narrative and make their own.

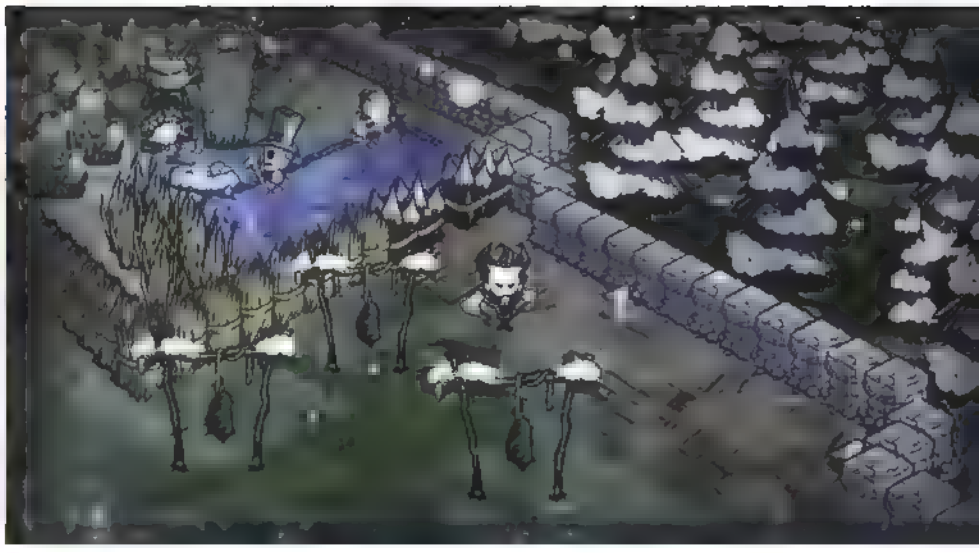
While many survival games let you embrace conflict with other players and kill them in a variety of ways, you can actually put your foes to work to create your own grand civilization in Ark if that's your thing. You can shackle, cage, tranquilize, force-feed, and essentially enslave other players to do your bidding for as long as you can contain them.

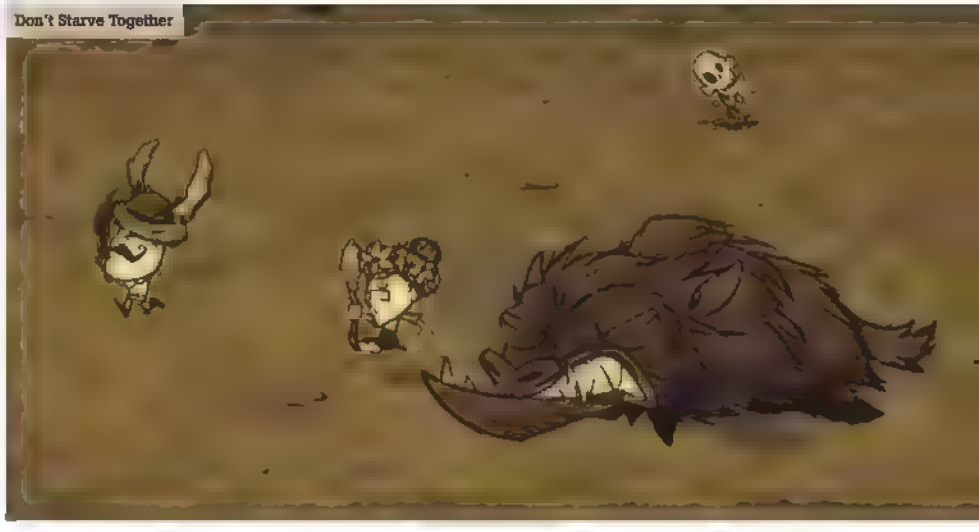
"Capturing prisoners is a big deal in Ark," Stieglitz says. "Some of the most amusing long-term narratives we've seen involve player doomsday cults capturing peaceful players and sacrificing them to the gods on the Ark's giant volcano, *Temple of Doom* style. Speaking of design changes in response to emergent gameplay, eating one's own poop was added in early play-testing as a suicide mechanic against being indefinitely captured!"

You can't delve deeply into the survival genre without mentioning Rust, Facepunch Studios' brutal survive-and-thrive multiplayer title. Yes, this is the game where you start naked and then bludgeon the first person you see with a rock. Taking down a wolf or engaging in a grim melee with a radioactive bear while you are clad in only a loincloth has never been so much fun. The appeal of starting quite literally in the buff and forging a future, joining up with a huge gang, and protecting your turf, whether it's a rickety shack or bustling base, is fairly enticing, with Rust selling over 3 million copies on Steam – and it's still not even out of early access.

Rust has been in a constant state of flux from its early access debut, with several changes already made to the experience and many more on the way. "I think it's integral to how games are made on PC now," Newman says. "Release early and often. We've been making Garry's Mod for 10-plus years, and we're still not done. If early access existed 10 years ago, Garry's Mod would still be in it."

Ark: Survival Evolved





Don't Starve Together

Last Man Standing

The survival genre loves its zombie apocalypse scenarios, and Daybreak's H1Z1 has continued to add things to the popular model of staying alive under duress from the undead hordes. Plenty of zombie-infused DayZ clones are out there on Steam to pick from, but one way H1Z1 has distanced itself is with a spin-off of sorts, H1Z1: King of the Kill (KotK). Some survival titles are branching off by allowing players to get right into the meat of the survival arena experience, without the fuss of all the building and scrounging. These grand melees tap into the essence of a PvP experience and shift the focus to compelling survival combat.

"We separated our early access titles into two distinct core game experiences that share the H1Z1 universe," says senior vice president of games at Daybreak Larry LaPerre. "H1Z1: Just Survive is our open-world sandbox, a persistent survival experience that we are still testing and learning with. And H1Z1: King of the Kill is an accessible, session-based, competitive, massively multiplayer, single-elimination match. With KotK, 150 real competitors simultaneously parachute into a huge northwestern U.S. rural region, scavenge for weapons, and simply survive to be the last one standing. In KotK, we find players just want to have fun; we are purposely trying to keep it light, while maximizing the competitive spirit."

While players attempt to avoid the deadly titular virus, they must watch out for other players, deadly animals, zombies, and more as they compete for the resources and weapons to stay alive. With King of the Kill taking the spotlight, it's evident that players are eager to watch others battle for survival and supremacy. This adds to the whole spectacle of the experience, allowing for a more focused and less freeform soiree that ends with the exhilaration of being the last one alive.

"Our King of the Kill team is wrapping up the PC launch and will move on to focus on console development," LaPierre says. "In addition, we are heading into our second H1Z1 Invitational at TwitchCon 2016 in San Diego. We are really excited about this. Our player base has proven that they are instinctively competitive and we want to foster that competitive spirit by providing them with the necessary tools and structure. With KotK, we wanted to build a game that is competitive at its core, one that is consistent, predictable, fair and as fun to watch as it is to play."

Ark has also embraced this philosophy with a survival spin-off that now stands on its own, Survival of the Fittest. "We developed a competitive arena *Hunger Games*-style mod for Ark as a weekend diversion, and it became pretty popular," Stieglitz says. "So we hosted some tournaments, and they were quite engaging to watch. However, as a mod it could not have specialized eSports-style ranked auto-match-making, nor be fully optimized. So spinning Survival of the Fittest off into its own game allowed us to give it the extra polish to stand as a fully competitive title, with dynamic ladders and monthly Tournaments."

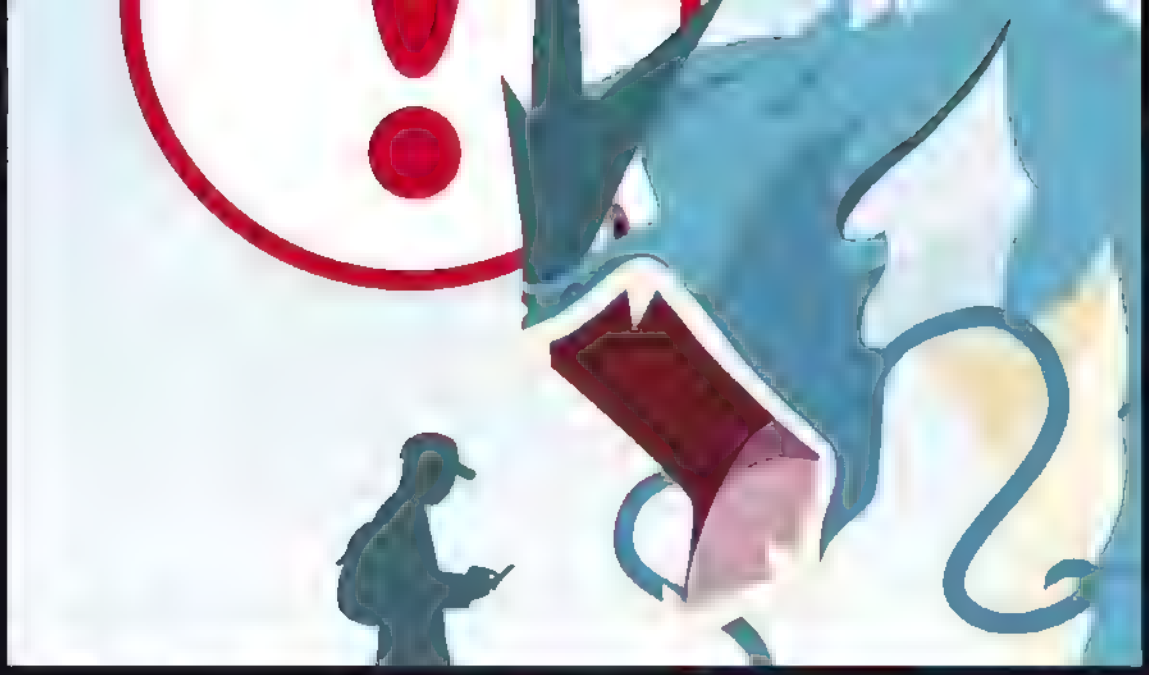
Xaviant's The Culling also taps into this emphasis on the *Hunger Games* vibe, hosting battle royales with 16 players and a 20-minute game clock.

Staying Alive

The survival genre is alive and well, despite its somewhat morbid fascination with death. As new innovations continue to spur on the titles with additional game modes and myriad mods, there's still plenty of room for new players in the space with ideas that challenge and change the rules of survival.

One thing mentioned frequently in survival circles is the scope and scale of the servers, whether they support 10 people or 200, and how the server rulesets call for wipes at regular intervals to keep things fresh. Newman thinks the future may lie in a more MMO-centric approach. "We need to go bigger," he says. "We need 100,000 player servers, huge persistent worlds that never wipe."

Whatever direction survival games eventually go, one truth remains – they need to adapt to survive.



Pokémon Go

An experience in need of evolution

Pokémon Go is everywhere. From giant park gatherings to businesses springing for Pokémon lures to attract customers, everyone from curious kids to white-collar lawyers taking lunch breaks are whipping out their phones for a chance to catch one. Building on the framework of its previous augmented-reality game Ingress, Niantic has created a genuine global phenomenon fueled by the beloved IP that has been around for ages.

by Daniel Tack

Pokémon Go is a free-to-play exploration title for smartphones that syncs up and integrates into players' real lives, motivating them to seek out landmarks, points of interest, and other neat spots in cities that may be off the beaten path, with the goal of catching the classic creatures that have made Pokémon a hit brand for more than two decades.

Playing the game is easy. Simply download the game on your phone, and you're ready to start finding creatures in the real world. Your phone buzzes when a Pokémon is nearby, and then with a quick touch you lob Pokéballs at the creature until you capture it or it escapes. Players have the option to do these catches in augmented reality, i.e., the little creature will show up on your phone screen in the real world, either on your friend's shoulder or maybe hanging out in a tree. Finding Pokémon in places both common and unusual makes for great social media fare, as nothing is quite as humorous as finding a Dratini in the bathtub or a Grimer in your toilet.

Other people are essential to the Pokémon Go experience. Whether you're simply meeting another player during an epic catch, hanging out in a crowd during a lure party, or forging a friendly rivalry with several opposing teams outside of a local gym, interaction with the community is a driving force behind the shared experience. The sheer diversity in crowds is a testimony to the game's accessibility, and is a major boon. Not everyone wants to engage with gym battles, but running around town or the local mall to find rare Pokémon touches some primal nerve, which is fun for everyone while scratching that collector/completionist itch.

Pokémon Go is a massive hit for those looking for a social MMO experience that bleeds into reality. While players can skip the social aspects of the game (I've seen plenty of folks that just want to play their own game privately out on the sidewalk), it adds a neat element to the experience that you can't find in your living room. Meeting and interacting with real people is essentially a game mechanic. Rivalries that form over local gyms can lead to interesting banter and friendly conflicts that last weeks. Alternatively, just using it as a gamification gimmick to go outside and move around to play games is an effective and fun way to incorporate physical activity into a day.

Server stability can often be an issue for big MMOs and Pokémon Go is no exception. Server issues have been a continual, serious problem. While it's easy to attribute these problems to the overwhelming popularity and success of the game out the gates, it's still disappointing — especially when you plan a day trip to meet with hundreds or thousands of players and then the servers stop working.

A few weeks after launch, Pokémon Go is like a Magikarp. It's floundering around and making a splash, but could evolve into something epic (like a Gyarados, for the initiated). Niantic has a roadmap for continued support, with trading, battles, raids, new Pokémon, and more on the horizon.

Pokémon Go has the potential to redefine the concept of the modern MMORPG and has the opportunity to take us to amazing new places, but whether we go there or not will depend on Niantic's post-launch support and major updates. ♦

Science Fiction That's Better With A Friend

It's no secret I'm an avid fan of speculative fiction, so I'm always attracted to new sci-fi universes. This month brought me into contact with two wildly divergent new science-fiction games, both of which deserve to be on your radar in the coming months.

After an initial blast of launch games for the HTC Vive, things have been relatively quiet for the Valve-aligned VR headset. I've been keeping my eye on upcoming releases, and one project that has emerged as a standout is **Raw Data**. Even after several VR games have experimented with the potential for first-person shooting, most released projects feel like conceptual demos rather than full-fledged games. While Raw Data is still in early access, it's clear developer Survios has a vision for a more robust and feature-complete final experience.

The storyline leaps ahead from the present to the year 2271, when a massive corporation called Eden has gained control of the world. Your hacking collective must infiltrate Eden facilities to download incriminating data and get out alive. The familiar story setup paves the way to multiple shooting stages within Eden's robot-guarded halls.

Like many VR games, Raw Data looks for engagement and fun through its interaction model; you reload pistols from magazines sitting at your hip, and draw energy swords from over your right shoulder, igniting with the press of a button. Two starting heroes and their weapons are proof of concept for both ranged and melee combat options, but Survios is promising multiple additional play styles that unlock over time, including bullet-time effects, telekinesis, grenades, and bows with explosive arrows.

The battles are tense, as you teleport around the arena space, pump-reload shotguns during brief moments of safety, physically dodge blows from drones, and duck behind cover to avoid bullets. Difficulty balancing still needs work, and I wonder if moments of humor provided by a screwy A.I. character can help maintain a lively story. But there's no doubt that one of Raw Data's other features should be a major attractor; two-player co-op lets you work together with a friend to confront the evil corporation. It should be interesting to see the ways players can use in-VR body language to communicate, or if this is the VR FPS so many players desire. Survios is planning for a Vive release later this year.

I knew very little about **Cryptark** prior to diving into a lengthy hands-on session, but that time has rocketed the new roguelike high onto my list of recommended titles. As either a solo adventuresome pilot or with a cooperative partner at your side, Cryptark puts you in charge of infiltrating derelict spaceships in search of salvage. Each ship you encounter has its own procedurally generated layout, including a bevy of robotic security and several interlocking ship systems that must be shut down before your loot can be secured.

The mechanized suit you fly is highly customizable, with multiple weapon and item slots. A machine gun-toting powerhouse with healing capabilities plays much differently than a shield and melee-tuned rig kitted out with lots of security keys. New weapons, equipment, and even suit frames open up all the time, lending an air of experimentation to your battles. Combat is fierce thanks to constant fast-moving enemies, aggressive physics that can hurl you around the stage, and weapons you can fire either in separate bursts or in wild simultaneous blasts of destruction.

Cryptark's coolest feature is the ship layouts, where you're forced to confront any number of hurdles before completing a level. The central core might end the mission, but not until you drop the shield system on the other side of the ship. But do you risk blowing those shields before you take out the alarms, or the repair control that will inevitably bring the shields back to life?

Alien Trap's blistering shooter was hard for me to put down, and I'm eager to dig deeper on both its story-based campaign (or co-op campaign), as well as the Rogue game mode built for players who want to get right into the action. You can play an early access version that's ready for discovery, or watch for a final version on PlayStation 4 and PC in December or January.

First You Map The World, Then You Give It Pokémon Go

Moving forward, John Hanke and Niantic, the company he founded, will be known for Pokémon Go. The game is a massive, global phenomenon, but Hanke has more to his legacy than just fostering one of the most successful mobile games of all time. Along with producing one of the first 3D MMOs, Hanke also helped Google map the world. We sat down to discuss his past and his vision for Niantic moving forward.

When did you know you wanted to be in the world of technology and gaming?
For me, tech, programming, and games were all the same thing. I was drawn to the computer in the same way a lot of people were – I saw somebody playing a game on it. This was back when I was a kid – in middle school, basically. The very first video game systems were coming to the market, and the first 8-bit computers were kind of being introduced. The TRS-80, the Atari home computer, the Apple II was that era. It was all new back then, and the games were one of the few things that you could actually do on a computer. They weren't necessarily that useful back at that point in time. The old ASCII terminal-style Trek game was running on a TRS-80 in the math classroom of my school, and some high-school kids were playing it – I was in 7th grade at the time. I started hanging around and waiting for my turn to play. Then they were learning how to program, so I wanted to learn how to make my own stuff. That was what got me interested in technology and computers.

I wrote a bunch of different games, mainly to amuse myself when I was in middle and high school. I did sell one of them to an enthusiast magazine that published games back in the day.

You were a producer with Archetype Interactive for one of the first 3D MMOs, Meridian 59. What were some of the obstacles you encountered releasing such an innovative (for the time) game?
There was a huge amount that was novel about it. It grew out of the tradition of MUDs, which are text-based collaborative things that grew out of Colossal Cave Adventure – a text adventure on mainframe computers. It was kind of built in that tradition, but it was the first time we'd seen that experience on a 3D client on a PC. Technically, it was solving that problem of having this persistent world and having this server that basically had to communicate game state to all the clients and govern the actions of the game and not crash as you're adding more and more people to it – not unlike the Pokémon Go servers.

Between making games with Archetype Interactive and Niantic, you were mapping the world with Keyhole and later Google. What did you work on while you were at Google?
The timeline was, we came into Google in 2004, Google Maps was launched, and Google Earth was launched, and we formed this thing called the Geo division inside of Google and we worked on maps, Street View, local search – I was the vice president of Geo for products, and that stuff was generally under my purview.

I did that for about six years, from 2004 to 2010, and then right at the end of 2010, after doing mapping for a total of about 10 years, four years of Keyhole and six years of Google, I was ready to try something new. I had some ideas around mobile, mapping, and games, and was considering leaving Google to do it as a start-up. But I let it be known that's what I was interested in doing. [Google founders] Larry Page, Sergey Brin, and [executive chairman of Alphabet, Inc.] Eric Schmidt made arrangements to set it up as a start-up inside of Google. We created Niantic in 2011 and operated it within Google for about four years until 2015, when we spun it out with investment from Nintendo and The Pokémon Company.

Did you play the original Pokémon?
I was aware of it. I did have one of the original Game Boys, but I did not play the original Pokémon game. It was not a game that I owned. I came back to Pokémon with my kids, so my oldest son who just graduated from high school this last spring, he's 18, so roughly 10 years ago on the Game Boy Advance, which was his first handheld console. He started playing Pokémon then.

Through the DS and 3DS, we literally have a dozen Pokémon cartridges at home and probably a couple thousand cards and guidebooks. I experienced that world playing together with my kids and through my kids. After my first son I had a daughter and my youngest, who is 10 now, is very much in the sweet spot. Currently he goes back and forth between playing on the 3DS and playing Pokémon Go.

How does it feel to be in the middle of the global Pokémon Go phenomenon?
You can't complain when you're in a situation where a product you put out has become very popular. We're delighted. It's been hugely gratifying to see people pouring outdoors to play the game. People talk about it being the summer of Pokémon Go. To see parents playing together with their kids – every time I go to a park or look up and look around whenever I am out somewhere, I see people playing the game.

When I was at Comic-Con a few weeks ago I was literally surrounded by people playing Pokémon Go. You work on a product for a long time and I think the whole team feels incredibly energized to see so many people enjoying it. Yes, there is a vocal minority that have been critical of things, but that's to be expected when something obtains a high-profile status, so we kind of take that in stride.

It's surreal to be honest. I was in Japan when the game first launched for some meetings over there with The Pokémon Company and we had a big Ingress event in Japan planned for that first weekend after the game launched, and I saw a lot of that unfold from that perspective. Showing up on late night TV; professional athletes playing the game; showing up in *The New York Times* and *Wall Street Journal*. It was crazy to watch that as it sort of built up and spread around the world as we continued rolling the product out. I don't think anyone would have said they expected things to unfold that way, so it was gratifying and sort of surreal to watch that happen.

Have you had to re-prioritize internally following Go's success?
To some extent. Our resources were in just two products, Ingress and Pokémon Go, and we were weighted toward Pokémon Go already so it didn't change that a huge amount. With its success, we now have the runway to grow our team and invest more aggressively in the product, and that's what we're doing. We're building up our team and our resources so we can expand and grow the product and we're looking forward to doing that for the foreseeable future.

It's likely many augmented-reality and map-based video games will release following Pokémon Go's success. Are you ready to face the competition?
I think it's a new genre of games, so I fully expect to see other games out there that utilize location and augmented reality. I think it's healthy. There is definitely room for multiple successful games in the category. I think it is a really fresh area for game designers, developers, and publishers to explore with new kinds of gameplay. It's an area where there can still be a ton of innovation.

We of course plan to innovate and do new stuff inside of Pokémon Go, and inside of other games, but I think other people will as well, and I welcome them to the party. It's a positive step for everyone to bring games out into the real word and give people the motivation, the excuse, to get out, get some exercise, see new places, and hopefully have a good healthy interactions with other human beings.

You've referred to the systems that Ingress and Pokémon Go are built on as a platform in the past. Will Niantic be adopting other known franchises to this platform in the future?
Yeah, that's always been our strategy to build up a platform underneath a game that can be used for other games, and frankly other experiences that may not exactly be games, but are still within that area of exercise, discovery, and social interaction. The Niantic platform is very much a part of our long-term vision and we have some projects that are in the early stages now that will be built on top of it so you can definitely expect to see that from us in the future.

Does your son have a bunch of Legendaries considering who his father is?
He would love to have me spawn Legendaries in our house so he could collect them, but no, he does not.

Do your sons brag that their dad is in charge of Pokémon Go?
[Laughs] They have different personalities. I don't think my older two do, but I think my youngest might from time to time. I suspect he might, I'm not sure.

How do I catch Ditto?
[Laughs] Sorry. That's going to have to remain a mystery. Hopefully it will be a nice surprise for you and everyone when it happens.

CAREER HIGHLIGHTS

1984
Hanke creates and sells a game called Climber to an enthusiast gaming magazine

1984
While getting his MBA at UC Berkeley, Hanke joins his classmates in founding Archetype Interactive

1995
Archetype Interactive and 3DO launch Meridian 59, one of the first 3D MMOs

1996
3DO acquires Archetype Interactive

1998
After 3DO fizzles out, Hanke launches Big Network, a casual online multiplayer-game network, which is later sold to E-Universe

2001
Hanke founds Keyhole with the goal of building a digital Earth

2004
Keyhole's digital Earth attracts attention, and the company is acquired by Google. Hanke becomes vice president of Geo for products, working on things like Street View and Google Maps

2010
Hanke founds Niantic within Google to experiment with map technology in new ways

2012
Niantic releases Field Trip and Ingress, an augmented-reality game powered by geolocation

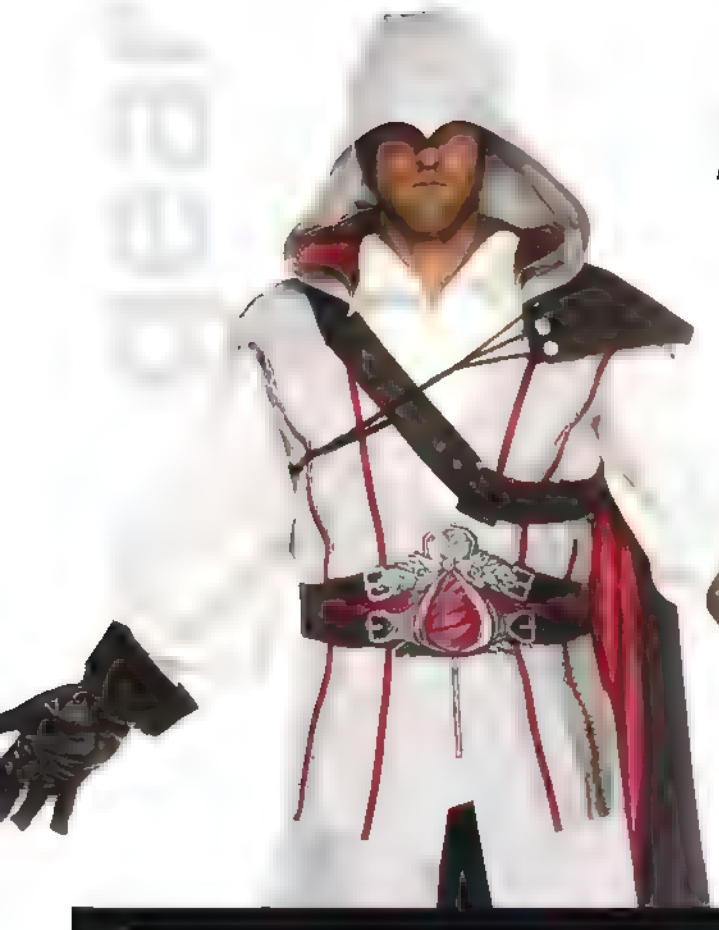
2015
Hanke breaks Niantic away from Google with the help of investments from Nintendo and The Pokémon Company

2016
Pokémon Go launches

DRESSED TO KILL

Rounding up the slickest video game costumes

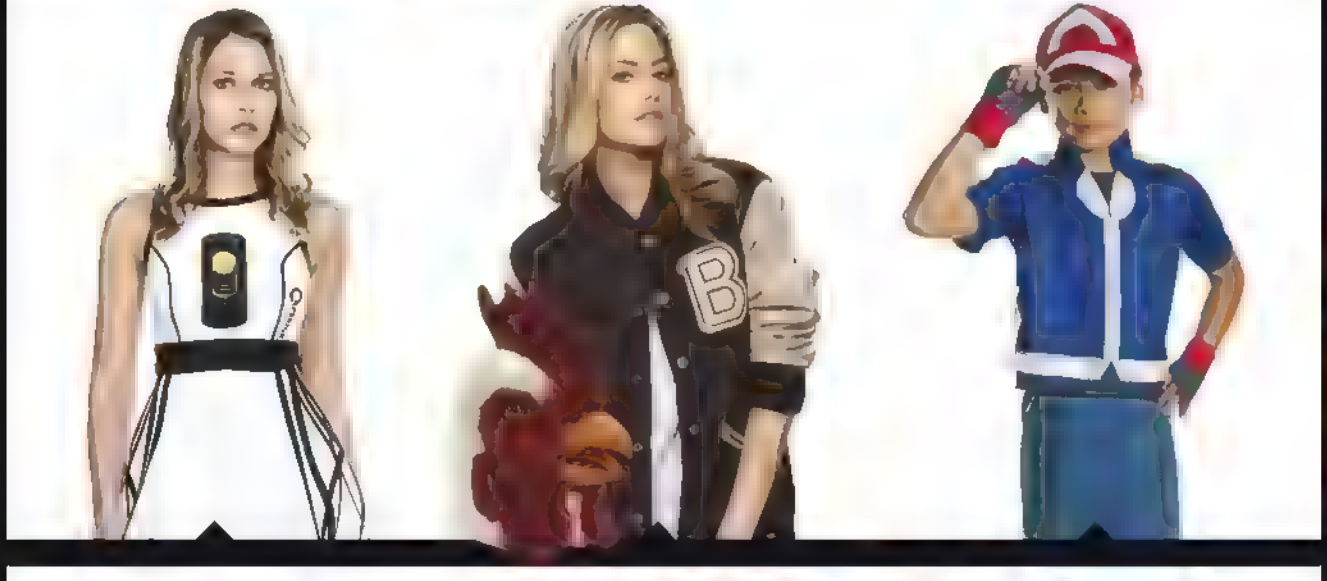
by Ben Reeves



1 Assassin's Creed Ezio Costume

Scale to new heights of popularity with this detailed Ezio costume. You might be hidden in the shadows, but when your fellow trick-or-treaters see you they'll be impressed by your Renaissance fashion.

$159.99 | *purecostumes.com*



2 I Am GlaDOS Portal Costume

Here's a test: Dress up in this clever homage to Portal's iconic antagonist and see how many people compliment your fashion choice. Feel free to respond with your own biting commentary on their outfits.

$34.99 | *halloweencostumes.com*

3 Hotline Miami Costume

A cheap animal mask will turn this stylish jacket into the outfit of a neon-lit '80s psychopath. As a bonus, it also doubles as a cool jacket you can wear on days that don't end in "ween."

$77.00 | *insertcoinclothing.com (jacket)*
$28.99 | *forumnovelties.com (mask)*

4 Kids Pokémon Ash Costume

If you're struggling to catch 'em all in Pokémon Go, maybe it's because you're not dressed for the part. This Ash Ketchum costume will look even better after you spray paint your dog to look like Pikachu.

$38.99 | *target.com*

5 Mario Riding Yoshi Inflatable Costume

This Super Mario Bros. costume is a two-in-one. While you pretend to be the Mushroom Kingdom's iconic plumber, your crotch gets to pretend to be his lovable dinosaur friend.

$54.99 | *buycostumes.com*

6 Five Nights at Freddy's Freddy Fazbear Costume

If you're looking to terrify trick-or-treaters while acting like an innocent animatronic bear, then this Freddy Fazbear costume is for you. Warning: This mechanical evil may eat you alive.

$44.99 | *spirithalloween.com*

7 Teen Sonic The Hedgehog Costume

This Sonic costume is alright, but the Sonic costumes that came out 20 years ago were way better. We don't want to say anything bad about Sega's speedy mascot, so we'll just say this: He sure is blue.

$44.99 | *costumesupercenter.com*

8 Street Fighter Chun-Li Costume

Chun-Li's daily training regimen includes 7,000 squats, which you might have to be convincing in this outfit. But if anyone makes fun of you, you'll be able to kick them in the face 100 times a minute.

$54.99 | *costumesupercenter.com*

THE IRON GIANT: SIGNATURE EDITION

When a giant metal-eating robot crash lands on Earth in the 1950s, his only hope for survival is the bond he makes with a courageous young boy. The directorial debut of Oscar winner Brad Bird *(The Incredibles, Mission: Impossible – Ghost Protocol)* is as compelling today as it was when it released in 1999.

$14.98
theirongiantmovie.com

MIGHTY JACK BY BEN HATKE

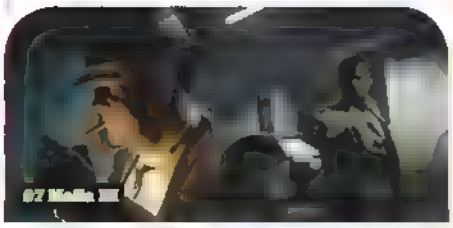
Jack's mom has just taken a second job, leaving him home alone to take care of his autistic kid sister. However, when Jack discovers a box of magical seeds at a local flea market, it sends them both on an epic journey that includes tiny onion babies, pink pumpkins that bite, and a real dragon.

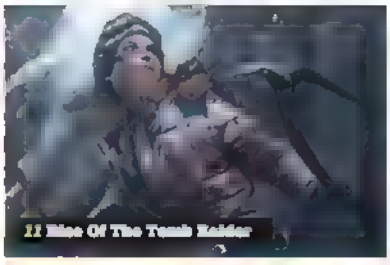
$14.99
us.macmillan.com

TRANSFORMERS: THE MOVIE

The year is 2005, it's the "future", and the heroic Autobots continue their war against the Deceptions as a new generation of Transformers rises up to face an even greater threat. The 30th anniversary re-release of one of the most '80s-defining franchises includes animated storyboards, a new documentary, and comes in a slick steelbook case.

$24.93
www.shoutfactory.com





October

2016

04 New Releases
- Atari Flashback Classics Volume 1 *(PS4, Xbox One)*
- Atari Flashback Classics Volume 2 *(PS4, Xbox One)*

05 Champions
Marvel Comics' *Civil War II* event is over, and now the heroes and villains of the world are dealing with the aftermath. In the first issue of *Champions*, out today, six heroes strike out on their own to change the world. Can Ms Marvel, Nova, Spider-Man, Cyclops, Viv Vision, and Totally Awesome Hulk bring balance again?

07 New Releases
- Mafia III *(PS4, Xbox One, PC)*
- Paper Mario: Color Splash *(Wii U)*

08 Geek Girl Con 16
A show that celebrates the legacy of women in games, arts, and technology, Geek Girl Con runs for two days in Seattle's Washington State Convention Center. Along with video game convention staples like panels, vendors, and gaming areas, Geek Girl Con offers a "DIY Science Zone" that allows kids and adults to conduct scientific experiments.

11 New Releases
- Dragon Quest Builders *(PS4, Vita)*
- Gears of War 4 *(Xbox One, PC)*
- Rise of the Tomb Raider *(PS4)*
- WWE 2K17 *(PS4, Xbox One, PS3, 360)*

13.1 New Releases
- Moto Racer 4 *(PS4, Xbox One, PC, Mac)*
- Super HyperCube *(PSVR)*
- Thumper *(PSVR, PS4)*

13.2 PlayStation VR Launches
PlayStation 4 owners can enter virtual reality today through the release of PlayStation VR. Retailing for $399 (for just the headset) or $499 (for the headset, required PlayStation Camera, two PlayStation Move controllers, and a PlayStation Worlds demo disc), PlayStation VR features more than 50 games in its launch window.

13.1 Books To Movies
If you don't like reading books, and would rather see their stories unfold on the silver screen, this is the month for you! *Jack Reacher: Never Go Back* opens in theaters today, and is an adaptation of Lee Child's 18th Jack Reacher novel. Dan Brown's novel *Inferno*, which tells the continuing story of Jack Langdon *(Angels and Demons, The Da Vinci Code)*, hits theaters on October 28.

14 New Releases
- Disney Magical World *(3DS)*

18 New Releases
- Exist Archive: The Other Side of the Sky *(PS4, Vita)*

21 New Releases
- Battlefield 1 *(PS4, Xbox One, PC)*
- Civilization VI *(PC)*

25 New Releases
- Dragon Ball Xenoverse 2 *(PS4, Xbox One, PC)*
- Farming Simulator 17 *(PS4, Xbox One, PC)*
- The Last Guardian *(PS4)*
- World of Final Fantasy *(PS4, Vita)*

28 New Releases
- The Elder Scrolls V: Skyrim – Special Edition *(PS4, Xbox One, PC)*
- Titanfall 2 *(PS4, Xbox One, PC)*
- Yomawari: Night Alone *(Vita, PC)*

20% EXTRA CREDIT

TOWARD THESE UPCOMING GAMES

WHEN YOU TRADE

AVAILABLE SEPTEMBER 2[illegible]

[illegible] on XBOX360, PS4, [illegible]

AVAILABLE SEPTEMBER 2[illegible]

[illegible] on Xbox One

AVAILABLE OCTOBER 7

[illegible] on PC

AVAILABLE OCTOBER 14

AVAILABLE OCTOBER 11

PROS SAVE MORE

[illegible] varies by. See www.gamestop.com/more for complete offer details. Credit must be applied toward the purchase of pre-owned or Nextgen Hot Selection, Destiny: [illegible] Box, FIFA 17, Gears of War 4, Mafia III, or WWE 2K17. Not valid toward cash trades. Trades must be in full working condition to receive full value. Defective items may be [illegible] for trade at a lesser value. Trades subject to manager approval. Cannot be combined with any other offer. See store associate for details. No dealers. Offer valid [illegible] the United States and Guam only. Void where prohibited. GameStop, Inc. reserves the right to cancel, terminate, modify or suspend the offer for any reason without notice.

GameStop

[illegible]

WOMAN VS.

PLATFORM
» PlayStation 4

STYLE
» 1-Player Action/Role-Playing

PUBLISHER
» Sony Interactive Entertainment

DEVELOPER
» Guerrilla Games

MACHINE

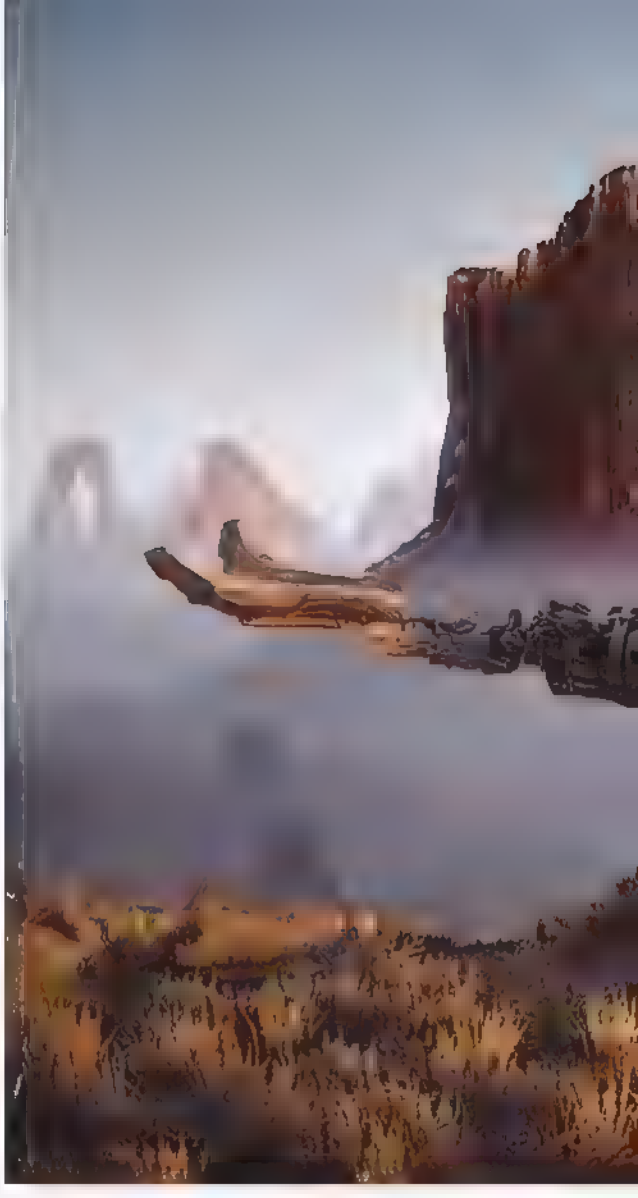
BY KIMBERLEY WALLACE

HORIZON ZERO DAWN

RELEASE
» February 28

In every studio's life-cycle, there comes a time to turn the tables and take a risk, but few end up doing it. In the expensive, tumultuous video game industry, a single flop can cost everything. Often, a studio is only as good as its last game. Guerrilla Games has spent the last decade working on Killzone, honing its skills at creating close-quarters, first-person shooters. The Dutch developers have never shied away from a challenge, even taking the opportunity to spearhead Sony's PlayStation 4 launch with Killzone: Shadow Fall. The series has seen its share of highs and lows, but Guerrilla Games' close-knit studio has worked on it consistently with little turnover.

Now it's ready to go bigger and bolder. That means ditching the first-person shooter genre for an action/role-playing game and exchanging claustrophobic maps with a vast open world filled with dynamic weather, a day/night cycle, and varied ecosystems. Guerrilla Games is putting everything on the line for an idea that excites the studio so much, the leadership feels it's worth the drastic shift from their expertise. That concept takes us forward 1,000 years, into a post-post-apocalyptic future where humanity's technological advancements have regressed and machines have taken over, roaming the world like wildlife as grand and breathtaking as dinosaurs. We visited Guerrilla Games' studio in Amsterdam to discover how this came to be, get more hands-on time with Horizon Zero Dawn, and better understand its mysterious world and protagonist.



TAKING A LEAP OF FAITH

Walking through the halls of Guerrilla Games, Killzone is everywhere. A trophy case shows off awards with special memorabilia, such as combat boots and a specially designed white-and-black Killzone PS4. A couple of life-size statues of Helghast troopers are hidden in the office corners, flanked by concept art. It's clear the team is proud of its work on the franchise; Killzone is what made the studio what it is today, giving it the freedom to move on and consider new ideas. While Killzone might dominate the office right now, Horizon Zero Dawn is slowly infiltrating the space. If you look closely, the middle of the trophy case has a shelf full of Best of E3 awards, a room has a beautifully painted mural featuring lead character Aloy in the wild, and fan art and pictures of people cosplaying as her plaster the walls.

When people heard the Killzone developer was behind Horizon Zero Dawn, many were surprised. It's not every day you see a studio completely move away from what it's known for, but Guerrilla Games feels like this is the right move. It plays to the team's strengths, but also adds exciting new challenges.

"It's fantastic when you work on a franchise for more than a decade (actually, in my case it's been almost 15 years) to do something so radically different and at the same time stands on the shoulders of what we made before," says managing director Hermen Hulst. "We really love making

fluid, awesome combat, and we're trying to do that again. We're really into making fantastic science-fiction worlds and we're doing that again, so there are a ton of similarities, but more importantly this is really fresh. After all the grit style of beauty that's in Killzone, we wanted to make something that's beautiful in a majestic way – a world that you want to be in instead of escape from."

The story of how the studio moved away from Killzone's galactic war to a primitive future in Horizon Zero Dawn is all about Guerrilla following its excitement and not allowing itself to be intimidated by challenges. From the onset, Guerrilla wanted its next game to be different. Art director Jan-Bart van Beek, who has been with the company for 17 years, had been wrestling with an idea about a future where machines are as natural as wildlife, all serving some sort of role.

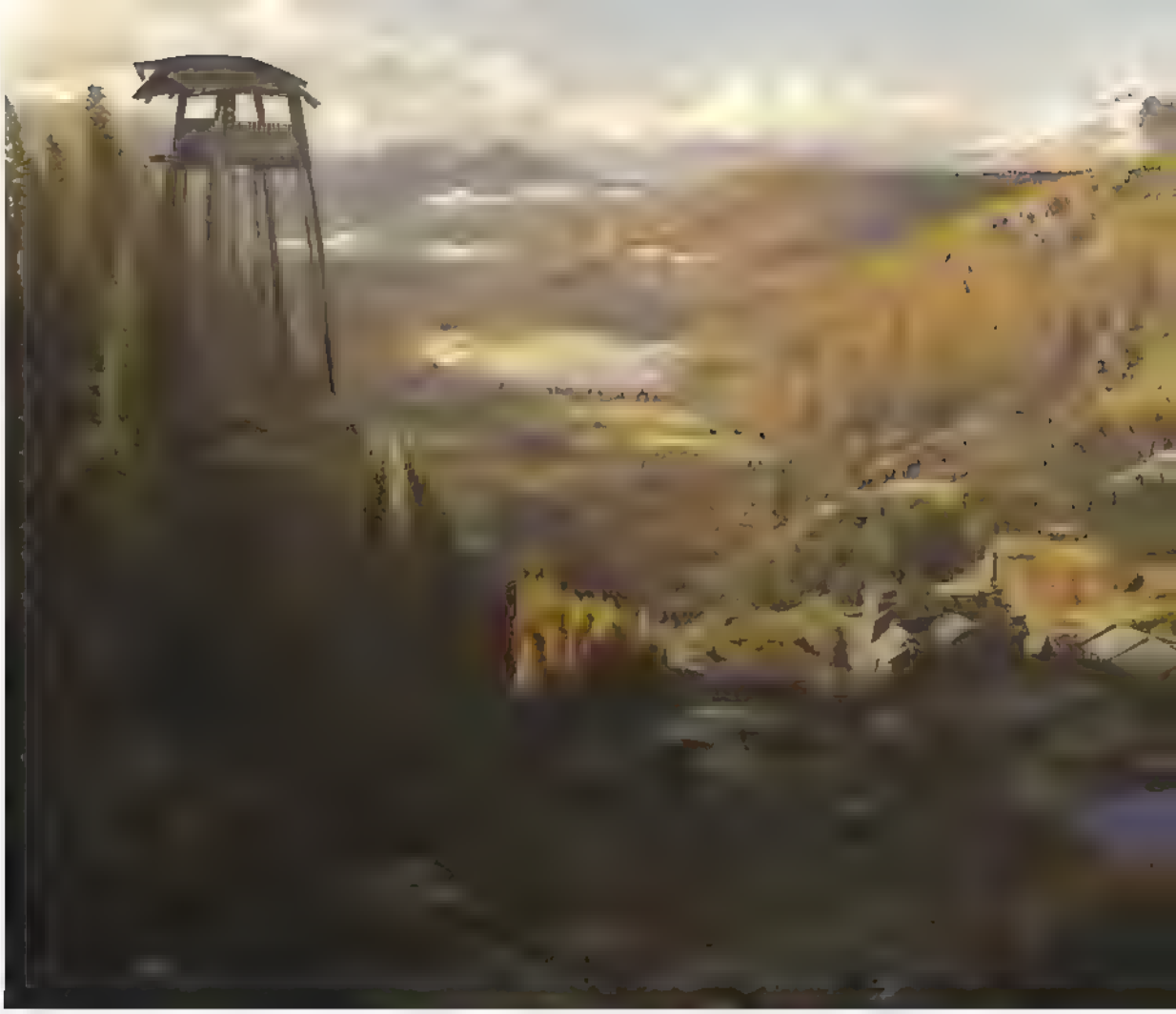
After discussing its favorite concepts from a company-wide pitch session, Guerrilla moved forward with van Beek's idea for Horizon Zero Dawn. "We decided Horizon was the cooler project that excited us most, but it was also the most risky project," says game director Mathijs de Jonge. "It was a new genre [for us] – an action/RPG, open world. We didn't have any tools; we didn't have an engine that supported [an] open world."

In the end, the enthusiasm won out despite the risk. "A large amount of people in the office said, 'That's the one. We've never seen anything like it [in video games],'" van Beek says. While switching to a new genre may seem strange, Guerrilla's office is full of RPG fans. "Taking a different genre in mind actually wasn't that weird of a step," van Beek says. "It was one where it's like, 'Okay, if we're going to do this and we're going to do this well, let's pick something that a large part of the company would like to make.'"

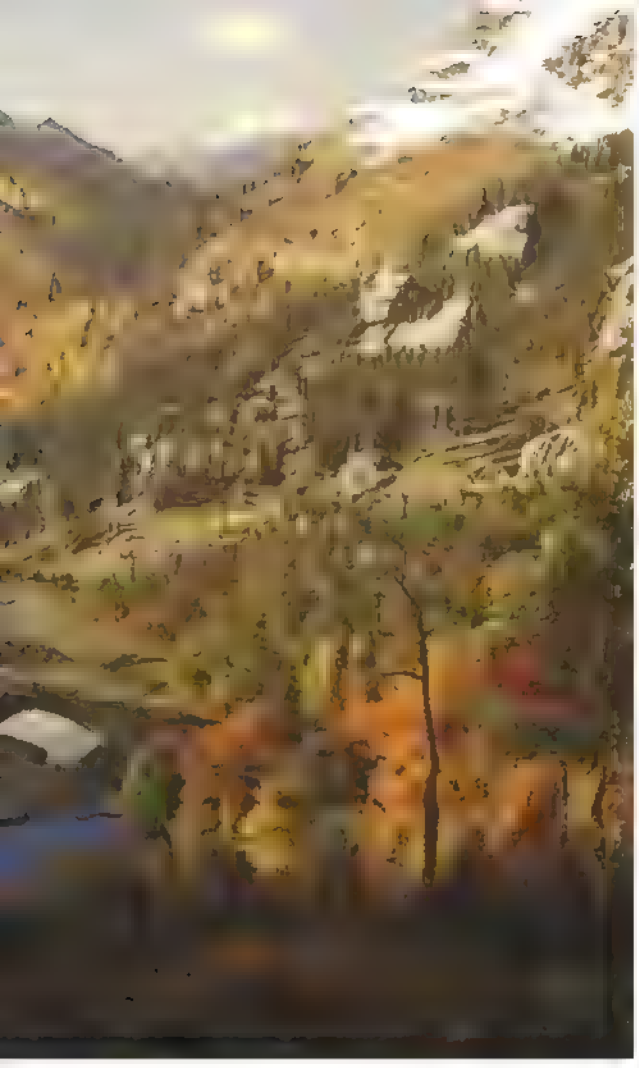
That was enough to convince Guerrilla to make this shift, and it's been ensuring it has everything it needs to make the project. Since the project's inception in 2010, Guerrilla built a new engine to support the open world and expanded its team to include developers who worked on big RPGs, such as The Witcher and Fallout. In 2013, Guerrilla brought on John Gonzalez as lead writer, whose previous work includes Fallout: New Vegas and Middle-earth: Shadow of Mordor, to help establish the lore and create Aloy's larger story.

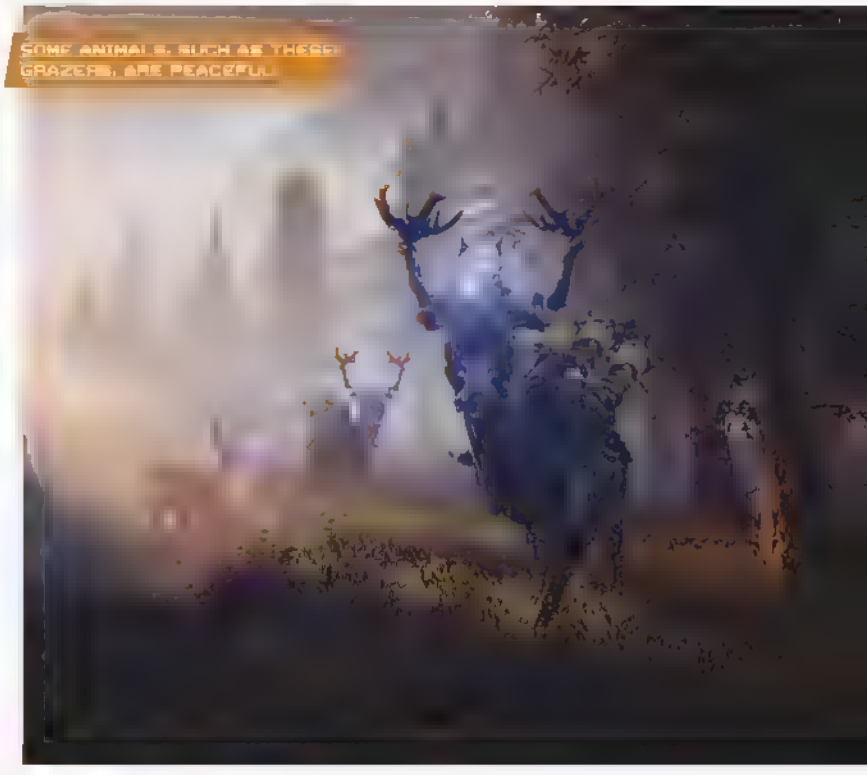
Gonzalez was drawn to the project for similar reasons as the rest of the team. "The basic concept that you have this far-future world that is populated by these huge mechanical beasts, and the humans are living at the feet of these behemoths in a kind of primal, primitive tribe state – that was something that struck me as being a strange juxtaposition," he recalls. "I was immediately curious about how that world came to be, so my imagination got hooked by that. I felt like I had to get involved in some ways just to make sense of that for myself."

From there, Guerrilla spent the time fleshing out its world (which does indeed take place on Earth) with plenty of secrets for the player to unravel.



YOU CAN CRAFT AND EQUIP DIFFERENT ARROW
TYPES THAT CATER TO ENEMY WEAKNESSES





BUILDING A MYSTERIOUS WORLD

Horizon's world is shrouded in mystery for a reason: It's up to you, as Aloy, to discover the answers. "This isn't the far future as a junk heap of the wreckage left behind by some kind of war, but instead it's this overgrown, verdant, majestic world to take part in," Gonzalez says. "It's also populated by these huge machines that are mysterious in their origins."

Every machine in the world has a purpose, and if you observe them, you start to figure out their roles. The team compares this to how we see wildlife in our world. Regular animals, such as rabbits and boars, also roam alongside the machines, and Guerrilla says the reason why the two coexist will be answered. Interestingly, some of the machines are reminiscent of animals we know, such as crocodiles and crabs. Depending on where you are on the world map, you encounter different ecosystems and machines. During our trip, we saw desert, arctic, and temperate climates along with machines that hid in the water and flew overhead.

The main story involves finding out how the world came to be this way, why humans are living in this pre-industrial state, and why the machines are becoming more violent. Guerrilla promises it will make sense in the end. "One of the very first rules that we had is that this is a work of science fiction," Gonzalez says. "We're not going to rely on fantasy at any point; we're not going to go for any kind of supernatural explanations. We really dug down into the history of the world and built it all the way up in order to imagine how it is this world came to be. What I want to put out there to people is just that it does make sense. We took that really seriously."

Majestic sights and interesting answers wait around every bend, allowing you to dive as deep as you want into the lore.

"For people who are story junkies, for people who like to collect every audio log or text log out there, people who want to have a grand narrative to their game, I think they're going to be really surprised and delighted by what we have prepared for them," Gonzalez says.

That lore also extends into the different tribes. During her journey, Aloy encounters several groups that approach the machines and their environment differently. Some also see the increasing danger of the machines as a message from the gods. In addition, the tribes have their own complicated relationships with one another. "We also wanted to make sure that [Horizon's world] had a history of its own – that there were large, earth-shaking events that had taken place among these tribes in the recent past and the aftershocks are still being felt as you're journeying around the game," Gonzalez says. While you aren't recruiting tribes to your cause, they sell you different gear and weapons depending which ones you visit. Helping out the members with the various side quests also nets you some valuable items.

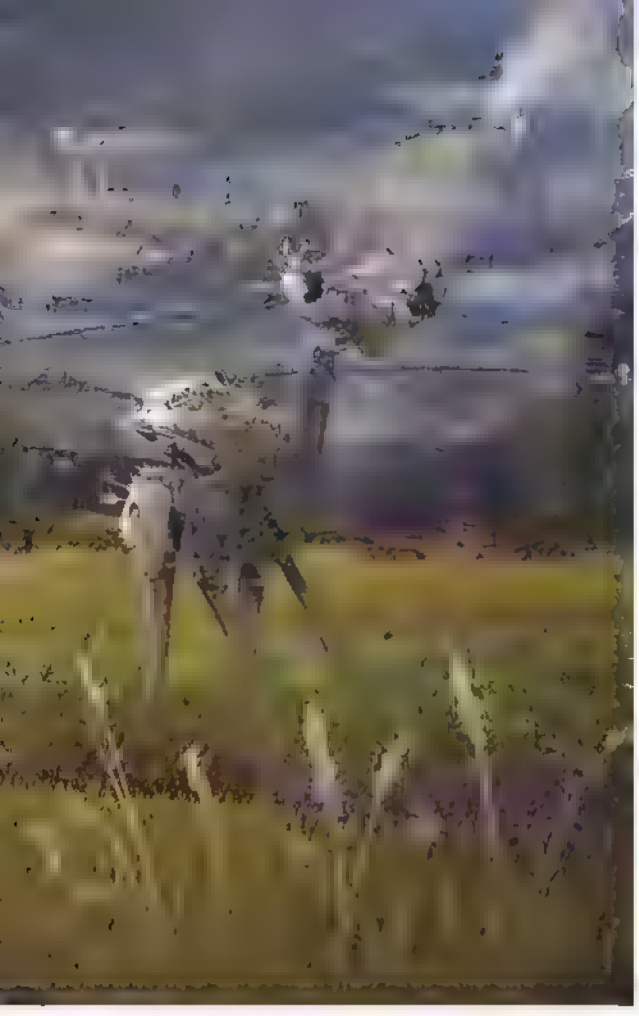
Horizon Zero Dawn has a cool world to get lost in, but Guerrilla also wants to make sure it has a personal story to tell, and the studio put great effort into giving Aloy a significant reason to take up the journey.

THE FUTURE OF KILLZONE

RISING ABOVE

Ever since her debut at E3 2015, people have been intrigued by Horizon Zero Dawn's protagonist, Aloy. The redhead resourcefully takes down machines by using her bow and arrows and setting traps, but she's much more than just a trained hunter. She's on a personal mission to discover her origins, particularly who her mother was. Aloy grew up in the Nora tribe (see sidebar), but has been shunned by her tribe since birth. This is evident the moment you step into her shoes, as everyone ignores her presence. If you try to engage tribe members, they are unfriendly, telling you to leave them alone and that they can't talk to you. Her whole life she's been cast out, but no one will tell her why.

Although Aloy has a rough lot in life, she doesn't walk around with a chip on her shoulder. Instead, it's made her kinder to people. "In addition to being someone who is extraordinarily strong and self-reliant, she also does have a certain type of woundedness from [being cast out of her tribe]," Gonzalez explains. "As is often the case for us as human beings, that kind of woundedness becomes the place from which compassion grows. So a lot of the time when she



meets people who have issues, as NPCs often do in these types of games, what we found is that it was really quite natural that she would end up helping out, sometimes even despite herself. She can't help but be moved by the suffering of others, having suffered so much herself."

Aloy was raised in the wild by another outcast, Rost, who took care of Aloy as a request from the tribe. "This is not something that he chose to do; this is something that was given to him by the tribe," Gonzalez says. "That's one of the other questions: When the tribe decided to cast out this infant, which seems like a bizarre act, why was it that they went to him and they gave him this duty? And what did it mean to him to accept that duty?"

Aloy and Rost's relationship is an important one. He's the only influential figure in her life, acting as the only parent she's ever known. "They have a bond, and that is a reason why she can relate to others and has the capacity to care when she is then heading on this larger adventure," Gonzalez says. From the interactions we saw between the two, Rost can be stern, but seems to only want the best for her. He appears overly protective, but wants to ensure Aloy has the skills she needs to survive in the world.

One of the biggest conflicts between them is Aloy's fascination with technology and ancient artifacts, especially as she begins to figure out how these ancient relics work. "The tribe they belong to as outcasts have strong taboos against the technology of the ancient world," Gonzalez explains. "I think that Rost feels like to be a good parent, he should make sure she doesn't have any kind of involvement with these relics that have this sort of [perceived] tainting or corrupting influence. I think that when he fails to enforce this, he feels like he is a failure...but he [recognizes] that this is a little girl that has nothing else, that she needs something more because she's been cast out."

ALOY'S TRIBE: THE NORA

with their own belief systems and rules, since the culture we

which ties down enemies. That's a Nora craft."

The Nora worship a deity called the All Mother, which is

because to them that's where all life came from. Mothers have

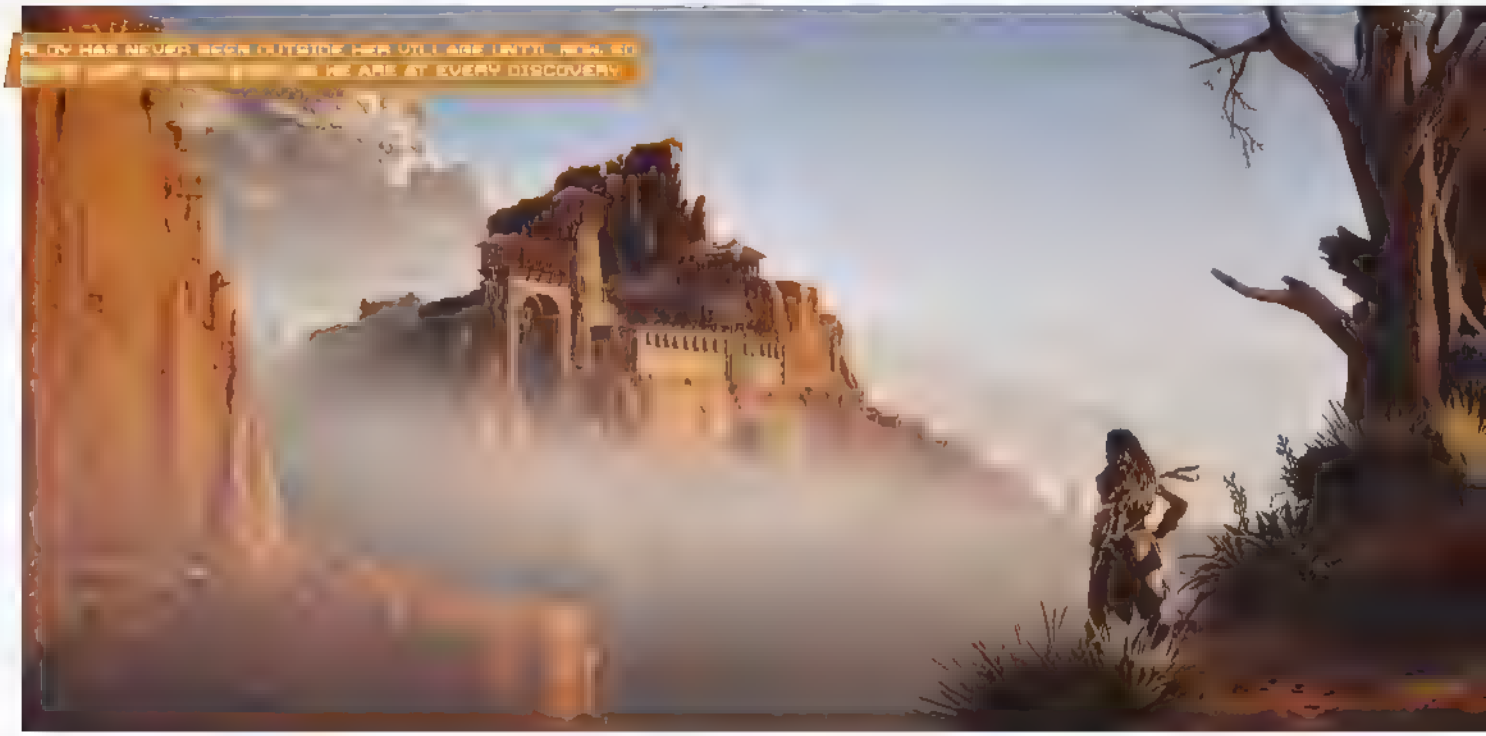
this makes it all the more painful."

learns more about them as she visits new lands. "As is un-

navigate on her journey."

Playable flashbacks of Aloy's childhood shed light on her plight. A good chunk of the game involves finding out the truth behind her past and why the world came to be the way it is. Because he's tied to the laws of the tribe, Rost can't tell Aloy what happened to cause her cruel fate, so she's been searching for a way to compel the tribe to give her the answers she seeks. Fortunately, she gets an opportunity to do just that as long as she can win at The Proving, a rite of passage that would erase her outcast status. "But that's actually not what she cares about, because as you can imagine, she has very mixed feelings about joining this tribe," Gonzalez says. "What she cares about is winning it, because if you win The Proving you get to request a kind of boon from the high matriarchs. ..and what she specifically wants is, 'Tell me who my parents were.'"

The story begins centered on Aloy's personal pursuit, but Gonzalez says it puts her on a collision course with the larger mysteries of the world. After all, things are growing progressively worse, with violent machines storming villages and hurting people. A certain catalyst, which can't be discussed due to spoiler reasons, puts her on the path to searching for answers outside of the village.

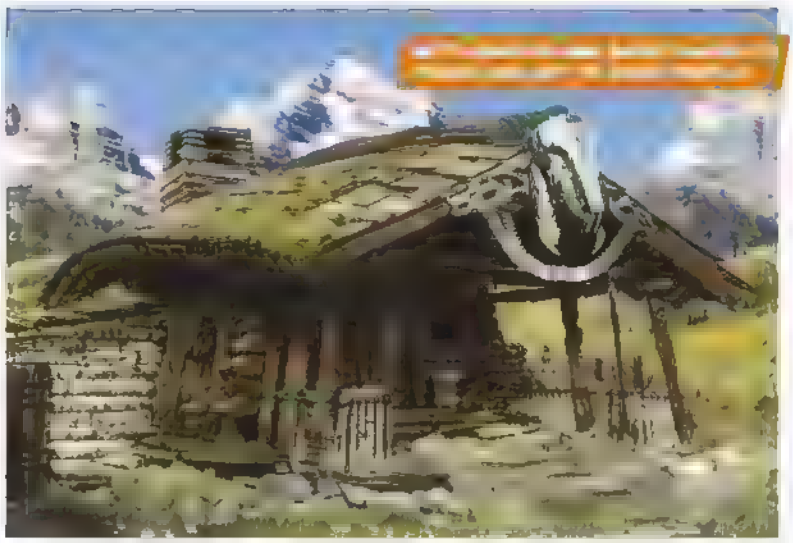

ALOY HAS NEVER BEEN OUTSIDE HER VILLAGE UNTIL NOW. SO
AS WE ARE AT EVERY DISCOVERY

STEPPING INTO A NEW QUEST

During our trip to Guerrilla headquarters, we got hands-on with the main quest about an hour into the game, where Aloy is preparing for The Proving. We're a few days before the big event and she's looking for Rost, who was supposed to take her hunting. Tapping the touchpad brings up my objective, which is to find him. I open the map to see the vast grasslands, and a yellow marker reveals his location. The map is expansive, and as you explore, details are fleshed out, including key icons and landmarks. In addition to objectives, it shows many creatures' habitats, so you can track them down for hunting, similar to the Far Cry games. You also see campfires, which you use to fast travel or save your game. Those aren't the only way to save your game, however; Horizon also autosaves after you complete big milestones.

You can also track side quests, which range from doing special timed hunting missions to helping out tribes and learning their backstories. Certain side quests allow you to make choices with the dialogue wheel that can determine how a quest concludes, and some decisions have a lasting impact on events later in the game. Don't expect something as sweeping as The Witcher, with choice, consequence, and branching paths, but side quests do have self-contained stories and introduce you to interesting characters.

As I head off to find Rost, I notice bandits roaming around. These are humans who have either been cast out of tribes or have chosen to live a life on the road. They are as much your enemy as the machines, so be on your guard at all times.



Bandits may have lower health than machines, but they show up in great numbers so you can't just tear through them with ease. For now, I evade them and focus on my objective.

I need to scale a mountain if I'm going to get to Rost. Traversal feels natural, and this ease comes in handy later as I try to fight off machines. Finding high points to climb in the environment not only gives you a vantage point to locate good spots to set traps or target a machine's weak point from afar, but they also can help you trick an enemy that's targeting you. However, once a machine spots you, it comes right up on the mountain or structure to attack you. You never feel safe for very long in Horizon's world.

When I finally locate Rost, Aloy confronts him about forgetting their hunting plans. Rost says he feels he's taught Aloy a lot about hunting, but there's still one lesson he needs to give her. Aloy says she'll learn anything he has to offer, and he tells her to prep some supplies before she heads in for a dangerous battle.

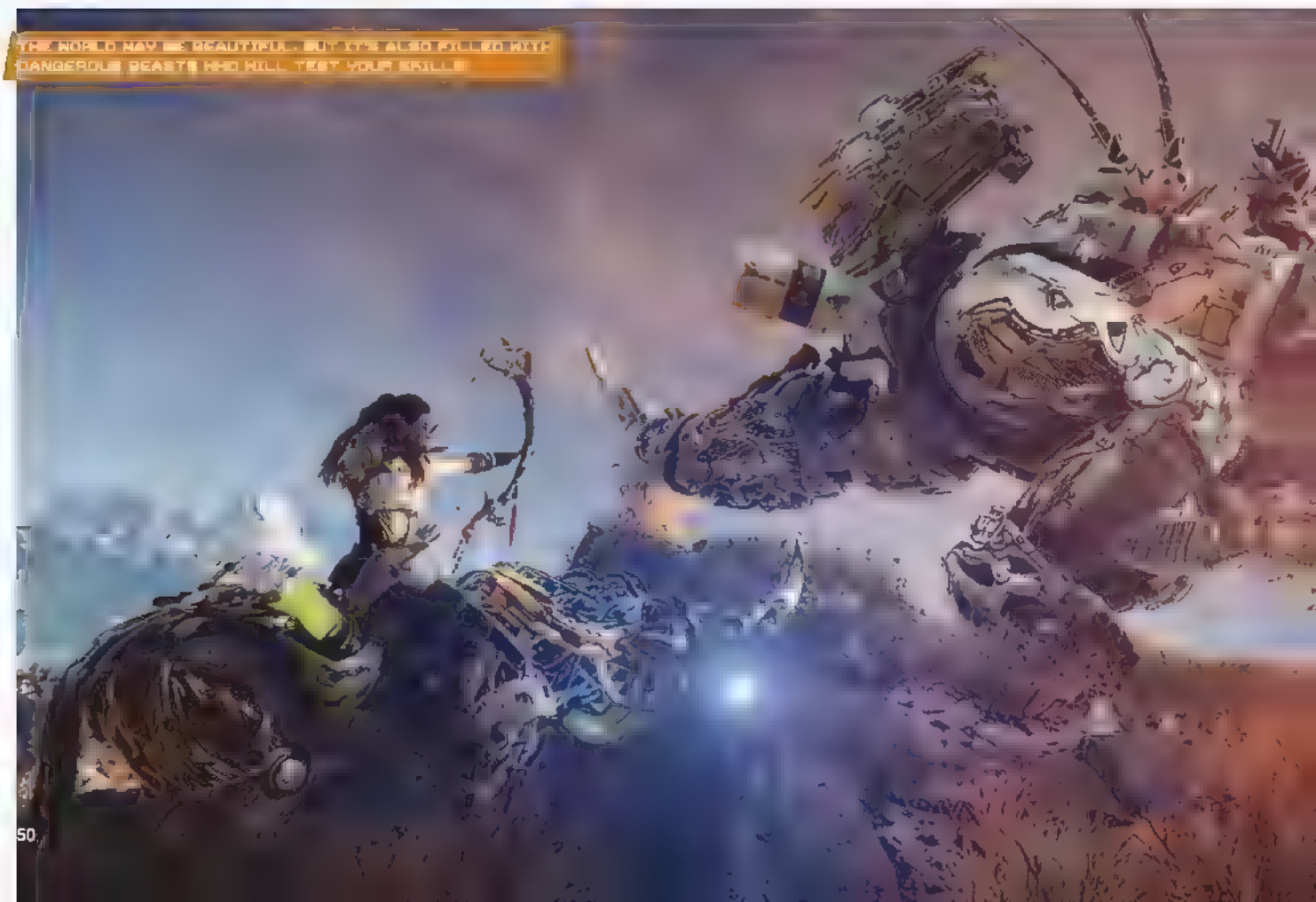
I need to get some fire arrows, but before I go, I choose to ask if something's bothering Rost via the dialogue wheel. When he says no, I press more, asking if he's afraid of what happens after The Proving. He simply replies, "What happens is clear. You'll be accepted as one of the tribe, and I'll still be an outcast to be shunned." Aloy tries to tell him she won't, but he cuts her off. Throughout the game, you have opportunities to use the dialogue wheel. "As you're playing the game, the interactive dialogue allows you to express Aloy's viewpoint, but it's also a way to deepen the relationships that you have with the NPCs," Gonzalez says. "It's also a way to find out more about the world and explore the lore we've created."

Before Aloy leaves, she tells Rost she's going to visit Karst to trade for a tripcaster, a nifty trap that puts down an electric wave to stun enemies if they walk into it. Karst is the only merchant who will sell to her, but instead of being grateful, Rost reminds her that Karst is breaking the law by selling to her.

As I make my way to Karst, I get distracted by a man screaming for help. Guerrilla says certain side events happen that you can choose to engage in or not, such as this one. I go over to the injured man on the ground, and he lets me know he's willing to risk talking to an outcast regardless of the consequences. He says his daughter is in danger; she went after a Scrapper, a hyena-like machine. Turns out, when he was fighting the Scrapper, his spear got impaled in it – and that spear is the only thing left from the girl's mother who died last year. The girl, unwilling to give up such an important memento, chased after it without a second thought. I agree to help and soon find the girl screaming from a tree a little way down, but I can't talk to her just yet.

A group of Watchers, resembling Velociraptors and housing large scanners on their necks, patrol the area. Their job is to alert other machines to intruders. If they spot me, their scanner flashes yellow signaling others to storm the location and surround me. You can use Aloy's scan ability to tag them and reveal their weaknesses. I hide in the tall grass and perform some stealth kills to get rid of them, using my bow and melee attacks for the last few. You have a strong and weak melee attack, but the strong attack is the way to go; you only need to land a few, and the enemy is down. Later in the demo, I see that I can land silent strikes from above, like when walking across ziplines, reminiscent of Assassin's Creed.

I was worried it would take me time to grasp the mechanics, but the controls feel natural and responsive. "[We decided] the controls all need to be very fast," de Jonge says. "Aloy is an agile character and we wanted to mirror that in the controls." Aiming and firing her bow operates just as you'd expect, and using the wheel to swap between weapons in the heat of battle is easy. Enemies all have weak points (some are more visible than others), and using Aloy's focus slows things down for a brief period so you can target these points with more precision. "You can shoot off armor to expose weak points and you can shoot off weapons to pick them up and use them against machines," de Jonge says. "There's also the hacking mechanic, so you can make [the machines] fight alongside you. There are all these different ways to interact with these types of machines."



I finally talk to the girl, but the villager's daughter is not going home without that spear. I use Aloy's scan ability to track the Scrapper's footsteps, similar to Geralt's Witcher sense from The Witcher 3.

On my way, I get near Karst's shop, so I go there to get my tripcaster before pursuing the spear. We make the trade and some small talk. During the conversation, Karst reveals why he trades with an outcast like Aloy, but I'll leave the reason for you to discover. As I continue on my journey, I spend my time picking up resources and plants throughout the world, so I can replenish my arrows. I love how fast the crafting is. You don't have to go into any menu; you just hold down a button when you run out of arrows or traps, and as long as you have the materials, you instantly replenish your stock. The world always feels full of resources for you to pick up, and while I played, I never had a hard time getting more materials to take down baddies.

Crafting is a huge component of the game. You do everything from crafting Aloy's gear to creating different ammo types for her weapons, such as fire, cryo, and electric shots. Hunting is necessary, as you need animals' skins to improve your equipment, like new armor and increasing your satchel size (which is vital since Aloy has limited inventory space). Meat from animals can help replenish your health, though Aloy can also craft health potions to keep on hand for tough battles.

Soon enough, I spot the Scrapper with the spear. I use the tripcaster and lure him my way, but the first thing he does is lunge toward me and jump over it, surprising me. This A.I. is smarter than I expected. Since I put myself out in the open to lure him, other machines have noticed our battle and have come to help him. I need to get away and rethink the situation since there's now an onslaught that outnumbers me. I roll away and find a mountain to climb. They've lost track of me for the moment, so I throw a bunch of tripwires to surround the enemies. I then go down and shoot some arrows to lure them toward me. This time it works. As I stun them, I go in for a critical-strike kill, which you unlock as an early upgrade (see more about upgrades in sidebar) that eliminates the enemy with one hit when stunned.

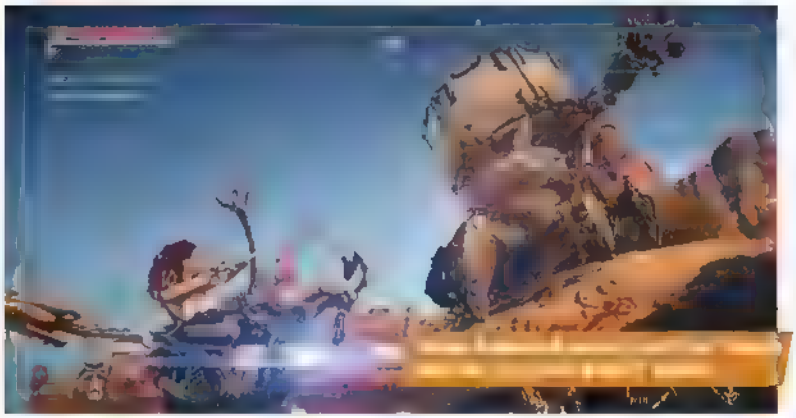
Battles are intense, especially as more machines come to help out. You feel vulnerable when you're out in the open, as you can be targeted from every which way. Even the sounds of the machines can be staggering; the noises can be just as terrifying and alerting as the screeches from the Velociraptors in *Jurassic Park*, and just hearing their large metal clunks can put you on edge. In many ways, a lot of my time was spent learning new strategies and trying different ways to take down the various machines. I love experimenting and finding more effective ways to overcome the odds, such as using stealth to slowly sneak up and kill each machine individually without having a chaotic battle. Later in the game, you get the ropecaster, which can tie down enemies, allowing you to tame them with Aloy's override ability. This not only lets you mount various machines, but allows them to fight by your side. After returning the girl's spear, I'm rewarded. The man gives me an upgrade for my spear, which increases my damage for both light and heavy melee. Who said helping people never got you anything good?

UPGRADING ALOY

enhanced crafting and override skills.

You can also find mods in machines to increase elemental values

edge in battle.



Now I'm back to tracking down some Grazers, which resemble deer; I need the canisters off their backs to make my fire arrows. I can either shoot the canisters off or kill them to obtain the three I need to polish off this story quest. Grazers are more peaceful machines, so they're likely to run if they see you, especially if they don't have any other machines protecting them. I plan to just shoot the canisters off, but end up missing my first shots, alerting them. They run off, forcing me to chase them down. My frustration turns into me just throwing down tripwires to stun them and kill them. Right now, it may seem like I'm relying a lot on the tripwire, but it's early in the game. You get more weapons as you go on, such as a slingshot and rocket launcher to add more options in battle. You can also craft mines, and as we saw in the E3 trailer, balloon traps you can blow up with an arrow as an enemy gets near one.

I return to Rost, which leads to Aloy having a serious discussion about how she doesn't want to shun him after The Proving. The tribe has already taken so much from her; why would she let them take away her ability to speak to the man who raised her? Rost is content to obey the law, but Aloy won't have it. Rost decides to leave it at that and tell her more about her final lesson.

Her mission is to fight a Sawtooth, which resembles a saber-toothed tiger, but in machine form. The Sawtooth is violent and has killed many in the tribe, and I find this out first-hand as the vicious beast immediately charges at me. I dodge around to avoid him pouncing on me and try to use the tripwire again as my main strategy. I alternate between melee attacks and shooting fire arrows at him while he's stunned. This makes short work of him, since he's vulnerable to fire.

Rost then begins his lesson, asking how many people this Sawtooth would have killed if Aloy didn't step in. He says Aloy needs to stop thinking about just herself and focus on what's best for the greater good – in this case, her tribe. The tribe will need her, and she must serve a purpose greater than herself.

A FULL-SCALE ACTION/RPG

What surprised me most on our trip was just how much depth there is to Horizon Zero Dawn. You have to think your way to every victory, and the smart A.I. keeps you on your toes. The game puts so much in your hands. For instance, you can customize Aloy's abilities to suit your play style, and the outfits you craft even alter her appearance. Every time you get a new weapon you feel like you have a new, creative way to kill enemies, and we've only seen a few of them in action. I can't even begin to imagine the havoc you can cause with a rocket launcher. Throw in that there are several tameable mounts that haven't even been shown yet. Every time a new element opened up in the game, my mind got excited by the possibilities.

This doesn't even consider all the surprises in store regarding the world and where it will all lead. Guerrilla hopes the answers are not what you're expecting, and so far it hasn't seen anyone on forums come close to figuring them out. The answers will have a major impact on Aloy's journey, but Gonzalez suggests they have more poignancy beyond that, saying, "[They] also have a lot of power for us in how we view our world."

We'll have to wait and see just how satisfying it all turns out to be, but it's amazing to think about Guerrilla Games' devotion to trying something new like Horizon Zero Dawn. Did you ever think the next big action/RPG you play would come from the developers of Killzone? If what we've seen is any indication, it might be one of the greater success stories of a developer not letting one specific genre or series define its future.

For more on Horizon Zero Dawn, visit gameinformer.com/horizon to watch exclusive video interviews with the creators, read more impressions from our hands-on time, and discover more about the lore and Aloy

A PEEK INTO HUNTER AND CORRUPTION ZONE SIDE QUESTS

of the other side content.

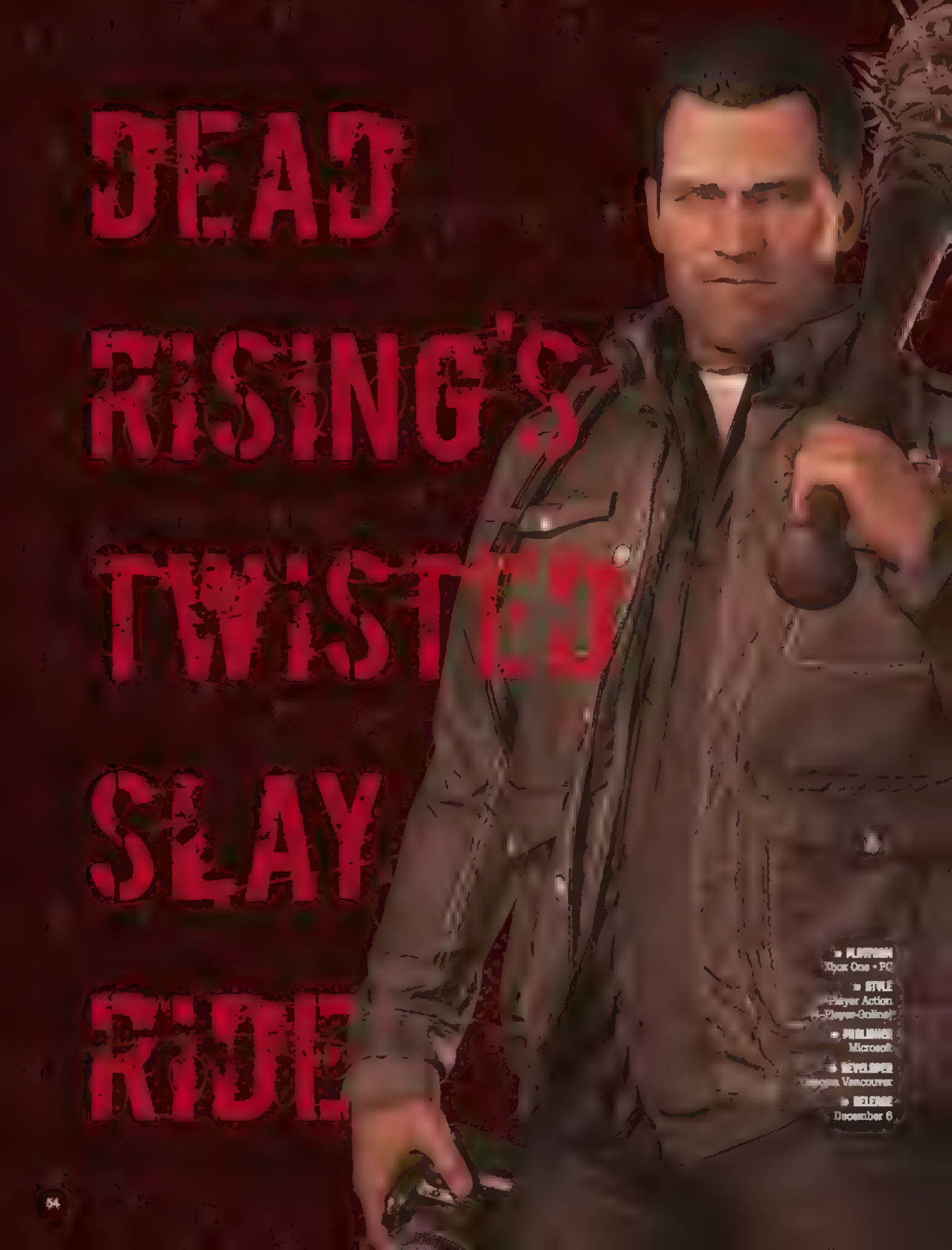
Guerrilla compared it to a hunter's guild.

blowing up the bomb near the Glinthawk and damaging it with its own attack.

your toes.

just yet.

DEAD RISING'S TWISTED SLAY RIDE



» PLATFORM
Xbox One • PC

» STYLE
Player Action
Player-Online)

» PUBLISHER
Microsoft

» DEVELOPER
Vancouver

» RELEASE
December 6

Dead Rising 4

Capcom celebrates the series' 10th anniversary by bringing the game – and Frank West – back to where it all started

BY JEFF CORK

They assemble outside the mall, milling around, hungry for what's inside. Hands press against the windows and doors, the slapping sounds reverberating through the building. Inside, the people brace for the inevitable incursion. Gazing at the hordes beyond the glass, they acknowledge chaos is coming, and that no matter how much they've prepared for this moment, nobody is quite sure how it will go down. A panicking person opens a door, and the swarm streams in. Pushing. Shoving. Groping. Knocking people and tables over in their thirst for… great deals?

It's hard to think of a day that exemplifies consumerism more than Black Friday, the day after Thanksgiving when people camp out overnight – and get in fistfights – to save $40 on yet another television or for a two-for-one deal on towels. This is ripe stuff for satire, especially for a series like Dead Rising, which has been skewering American society, greed, and violence for a decade. Dead Rising 4 is coming later this year, and if you thought Willamette was crazy in the first game, just wait until you go back to the mall around Christmas time. Parking is madness, and the crowds can be killer.

Going Back To The West

Frank West has been a huge part of Dead Rising since the beginning, even as other playable heroes have drifted in and out of the series. As the hero of the first game, the photojournalist helped to uncover what happened during a zombie outbreak in a sleepy little town of Willamette, Colo. Since then, he's appeared in other entries in cameos or what-if scenarios. He's even represented the franchise in other Capcom games such as Ultimate Marvel vs. Capcom 3 and Project X Zone. When it came time to work on a new Dead Rising entry, Capcom Vancouver says putting Frank back in the spotlight was an easy decision – even if time hasn't necessarily been so kind to our hero.

Dead Rising 4 may be coming out 10 years after the franchise debuted on the Xbox 360, but in the Dead Rising chronology, it's set 16 years after the first game. Players knew what happened with the outbreak, but Frank was left disgraced and forgotten. In the intervening years, Frank took his passion for photography and is passing it along to a new generation as a teacher. That is, until something pulls him back into the world of zombies all over again. How can a guy in his mid-50s keep up?

"He's not that old – he can still kick ass, for sure," says Bryce Cochrane, executive producer at Capcom Vancouver. "That's kind of been the thing about Frank. He's the kind of guy that never sticks the landing, but he's not afraid to go for it."

"When you talk to a 21-year-old and say this guy's 54, they go, 'He doesn't look 54!' Because he thinks 54-year-old people look 75," adds Joe Nichols, studio director. "We don't! Frank is older, but he's wiser, and I'm not going to say he's mellowed out, because that's not really true, but he's still got that great sense of humor. Frank would be an excellent guy to be cast in *The Expendables*."

Even hang back and attack when it's most advantageous, so keep an eye out for them if they're hanging on the sidelines

Frank hasn't grown up completely – he's still up for wearing all kinds of ridiculous outfits as he battles zombies – but his day-to-day look is slightly more sophisticated than before. He's ditched the black leather jacket and shades for clothes more appropriate for a person in his profession. "Frank is not a Chippendale, he's not going to be on GQ anytime soon, but he's finally realized, 'Maybe I shouldn't flip my collar up anymore because the ladies I'm trying to date don't dig that,'" Nichols says.

Photography has evolved over the past decade, and it's been modernized in the game, too. Frank has a variety of different filters at his disposal, which can be used to uncover clues and hidden secrets in the world around him.

Nichols provides a scenario that takes place in a room that looks empty. "You walk around and go, 'Maybe I'll try one of these spectrum analyzer features in my camera,' and lo and behold, you see blood marks and streaks of blood that lead you to somewhere you never would have found unless you used your filter," he says. "There are times where we make it obvious, like 'You should really think about using this feature' and we'll cue you to it, but there are also times when we don't, where we give you an opportunity to discover stuff on your own."

And, of course, Frank can take selfies now. "Have you ever shown your parents how to use Facebook?" Nichols asks. "And then you know what happens right afterwards. The next thing you know, they're posting the dumbest stuff in the world, and they're posting it the wrong way, and they're sending you personal messages on your wall? That's the kind of way that Frank comes across to me. Because he gets the technology – he knows he can aim the camera at himself and get it in focus, but he hasn't quite embraced the social skills there."

Winter Wonderland Willamette

Frank's adventure takes him back to Willamette, the setting of the first game. Hit hard by the zombie outbreak 16 years earlier, the town is nothing if not resilient. The residents have rebuilt and created what they consider a beacon to the surrounding community: an enormous new mall.

"The mall is really outsized to the town," says art director Geoff Coates. "The way that we were thinking about it was that after the first outbreak, they're looking for ways to bring people back into the town, so they build this giant mall. It has a lot of visual themes to it as well, and those visual themes are great ways to add variety to the mall."

Similar to Fortune City's various casinos in Dead Rising 2, the new Willamette Mall is a hodge-podge of different influences, such as areas themed like the Caribbean or Miami.

"The thing that I've always preferred about going to a place like Disneyland is that I get to go to all of the different continents in Disneyland within a 10-minute walk of each other," Nichols says. "We wanted to make sure that you weren't spending all of your time walking somewhere to

Boxing day? Boxing please!

get somewhere cool. We wanted to concentrate fun. So of course we have transitions from one area of the mall to the next, like a typical shopping mall, but when you get into the different areas of the mall, like the medieval area, all of a sudden there's torches and there's knights and stockades and stuff like that. It feels completely immersive, because we wanted people to go to the mall for escape, since Willamette's not a real swinging town."

Willamette may not be a real swinging town, but it's in the middle of the Christmas season. Outside of the mall, the streets are lit up at night with lights, and there's a holiday theme throughout the game – complete with brand-new carols and jammin' holiday tunes. Frank's arsenal gets a holiday refresh, too, with mortar-like weapons that fire off ornaments and presents that can be used like boxing gloves.

Coates says Willamette and its mall are similar in size to Dead Rising 3 as far as its physical footprint goes, but when you factor in additional places to explore, more shops that you can enter, and hidden areas to find, it's about 50-percent larger than its predecessor.

The action doesn't just take place in shopping areas and on the streets of its humble downtown, either. "We created neighborhoods," Coates says. "You have Westridge, which has a couple of different areas to it that have their own feel to it. There's houses there that are occupied by specific people and their house is decorated in a certain way or has certain things in it that are unique to them."

NEW GAME, NEW FRANK

Dead Rising 4 stars Frank West, but the longtime hero is getting a new voice. With the fourth entry, Capcom Vancouver has decided to replace longtime actor T.J. Rotolo.

"With Dead Rising 4, we wanted Frank to grow physically and mentally," says studio director Jon Nichols. "Thirteen years is a long time, and we also wanted to make sure that the chemistry of the voices and the characters were awesome. We do have a new voice for Frank."

"T.J. was really important at the beginning of the game," adds executive producer Bryce Cochrane. "Dead Rising 1 was a Japanese take on American society, which was awesome and great, and we needed to find how to keep that Frank West being true to the original character but also a little more grounded, a little more appropriate to North American audiences."

The Exosuit Makes The Man

The Dead Rising series has been steadily evolving over the years, and Dead Rising 4 keeps that tradition. One big change this year is that players can map specific weapons to face buttons, so they don't have to cycle through the inventory to fire off a crowd-clearing Blambow shot and use a machete to clear out the survivors. Bigger still is the addition of a new exosuit – military tech that makes Frank faster and stronger, and that gives him access to ludicrous amounts of power.

When he wears one of the suits – the perks of Willamette being a military town – he can smack cars around and uproot parking meters. But he can also combine it with other items in the world to create new combos. "There's a military one, which is completely overpowered," Cochrane says. "You have rockets, you have a machine gun, you can fire land mines." Players can expect to find combos that not only reference the Christmas theme, but Capcom's games, too.

Your time in the exosuit is limited by its battery charge, but the team wanted to make these short, superpowered bursts as fun as possible. "It also enables you to pick things up that you couldn't pick up before, like a ridiculously oversized flyswatter on an extermination vehicle, a parking meter, a Thor-like hammer that's part of a giant sculpture that you can tear off and use – that kind of stuff," Coates says.

DEAD RISING RISES FROM THE LAST-GEN GRAVE

Dead Rising has a fair amount of lore to wade through at this point, including the circumstances behind the initial outbreak, the military response, and the people who stand to make a profit from a zombie infection. Capcom is making it easier to catch up on the first few games, with remixes on PlayStation 4 and Xbox One.

These aren't remasters, such as the ones that the Resident Evil games have seen over the past few years, which feature reworked textures and models. Instead, the draw here is that you can play the original titles in 1080p resolution, running at 60 frames per second. "In terms of changes, there aren't a lot of changes," says Jon Airhart, director of product operations at Capcom Vancouver. "We really wanted to keep that classic gameplay and bring it to a new generation of gamers." This will be the first time the original game has been released on a Sony console, too.

As the oldest game in the series, Dead Rising 1 is getting a few revisions. Players can have several save slots, as opposed to the single one available in the original Xbox 360 release. Additionally, the controls are getting tweaked to support analog input, particularly in the camera controls. "It's a really subtle thing, but it helps to bring the game forward a little bit," Airhart says. Players also get access to all of the available DLC. It was cosmetic in the first entry, but later games included outfits with gameplay bonuses, such as a ninja outfit that prevented players from getting grabbed by zombies.

Three games are getting remastered – the first Dead Rising, Dead Rising 3, and, as a digital-only release, Dead Rising 3: Off the Record. They're priced at $19.99 apiece, and all three games will be available to download on September 18. Dead Rising 1 will be available at retail that day, too, and Dead Rising 2 hits stores on the 27th.

Licensing issues are keeping Dead Rising 2's prologue, Case Zero, and epilogue, Case West, off the table, but this trio of games should provide newbies plenty of backstory to clamp on – as well as an appreciation of why people like Frank West so much.

Zombies Ate My Neighborhood

The zombies in Dead Rising 4 are immune to Zombrex, a drug that's been part of the Dead Rising lore since the second game. As with much of the story, Capcom Vancouver doesn't want to delve into why that is quite yet. In the meantime, the team did provide some additional information about the zombies themselves, and they seem like a more terrifying presence than ever before. In large part, it's because of how they interact with the world – and survivors – around them.

"This is a new strain of the virus right now, and basically how it works is we have three classes of zombies in the game," Cochrane says. "We have the classic horde, we have what we call the fresh – the newly infected – and the evos. When you're first infected, you become fresh. Those fresh infected are faster, aggressive, but dumb as wood." Think *28 Days Later*, if you're looking for a good reference point.

From there, things get interesting. Depending on the infected person's body, the infection can go one of two ways. "If the infection bonds with them, they become what we call the evo zombies," Cochrane says. "They are thinking zombies. They're more predatory. They work in packs. They definitely show signs of intelligence in the sense of how they hunt their prey. They'll let the other zombies fight you for a while, and then jump in at opportunistic moments. The opposite direction of that is if it doesn't bond with them, our zombies become the horde. They're

Not pictured: Frank having the zombie to lunch

Frank still has a way with a bat in Dead Rising 4

slowly dying. The infection is killing them off."

The shifting dynamic between the living and the undead layers an interesting sense of urgency over the game. "You can go down a street, and there will be some survivors standing near a dumpster freaking out and shooting at the zombies, and you can help them or not help them," Nichols says. The consequence of not helping is that the zombie infection spreads, making your survival that much more difficult.

"We have different encounter types, and they happen in different places, and you're never quite sure when it's going to happen," Nichols adds. "A doorway in a store, you could walk by and four times out of five nothing happens. That fifth time, a freshly infected is chasing a human that's shooting back at him and it runs right in front of you and you're in the middle of it."

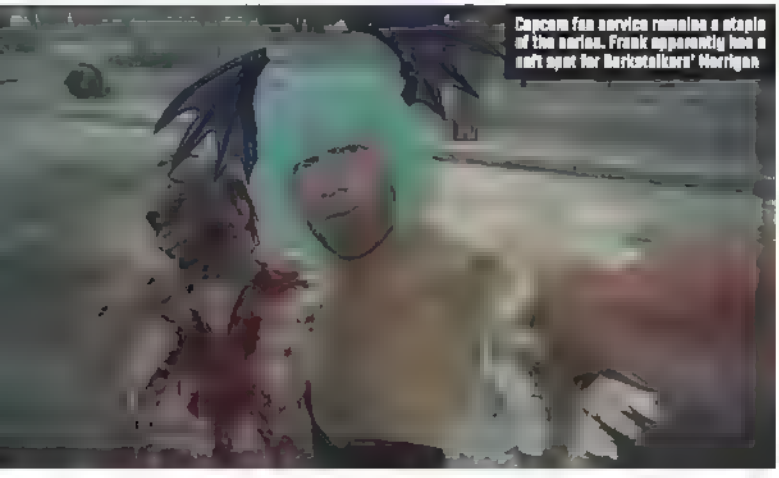
Some key survivors provide bonuses once they find their way back to the safe house, similarly to how they did in Dead Rising 3. While it might be easier to let the zombies gnaw on that guy's face, he might be able to help you out later by providing maps or helping with crafting. Frank can hold his own – especially in an exosuit – but he can still use all the help he can get.

Last Words

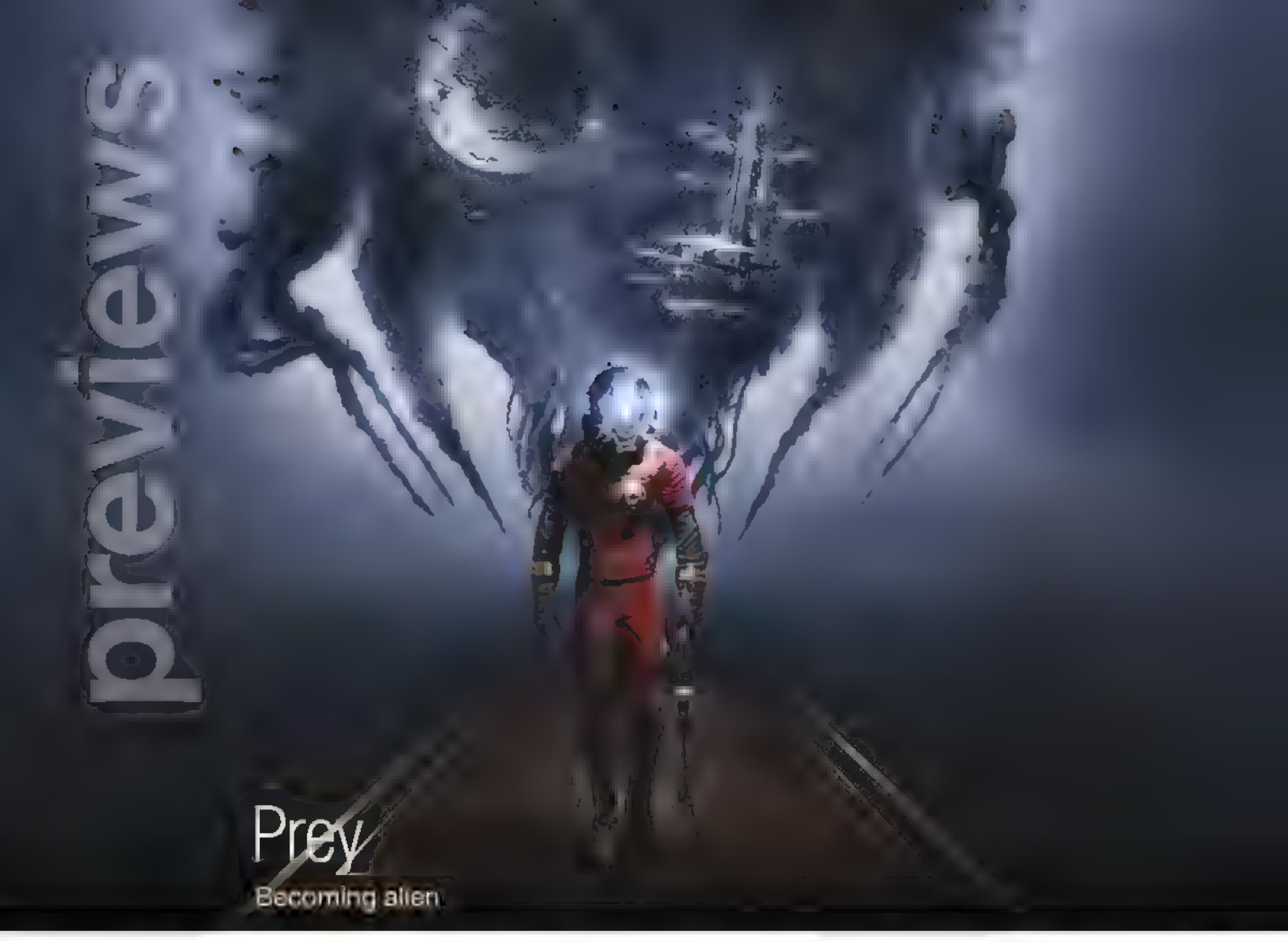
Capcom Vancouver has developed the majority of the games in the Dead Rising series now, and it's seen as the stewards of the franchise. Talking to the team, it's clear they're as excited about the zombie-slaying madness as ever.

Nichols thinks back to when the first game was pitched, and how insane the concept must have sounded. It's a third-person action game where nearly everything is a weapon, you can dress up however you want, and you can take pictures of the chaotic results. "That's what I love about Dead Rising," he says. "All of the ingredients together should turn out to be a brown mess, but it's not, because it just works. Because it's fun."

"One of the great things about working on this franchise is that we don't have to take ourselves seriously," Cochrane adds. "We're making a game that has to be fun and has to be engaging, but one of the things that's super nice about working with Capcom is they like weird stuff. They let us do as much of that stuff as we can come up with. There's obviously a line that we can't cross, but we haven't found that line yet."



Capcom fan service remains a staple of the series. Frank apparently has a soft spot for Darkstalkers' Morrigan



Prey

Becoming alien

» [redacted]
PlayStation 4
Xbox One • PC

» **Style**
1-Player Action

» [redacted]
Bethesda Softworks

» [redacted]
Arkane Studios

» **Release**
2017

Arkane Studios' reimagining of Prey was the talk of this year's QuakeCon expo, dazzling showgoers with seven minutes of gameplay footage that showed just how alien this science-fiction shooter is going to be. Raphael Colantonio, the president and co-creative director at Arkane Studios, and Ricardo Bare, the lead designer of Prey, narrated the demo with nervous excitement, often pausing mid-sentence as the roar of the crowd became deafening during certain gameplay moments.

The footage began with protagonist Morgan Yu (who can be either male or female) waking up on a space station called Talos One. Although the space station appears to be somewhat retro in science-fiction design, signs of high society are abundant. Beautiful statues, gold floors, and rich décor line the lobby, which is in disrepair and looks like it was the recent location of some kind of tussle. Yu, who is male in this playthrough, pulls himself off the floor and grabs a lead pipe. He ascends a staircase, but pauses to do something perplexing: He swings his wrench at a trashcan lying on the stairs. The force of the blow sends the gold trashcan down the stairs. Yu eyes it briefly and continues climbing.

Colantonio tells us that aliens called Mimics have infested the space station and can transform into any object, thus the reason for concern from Yu. Any inanimate object could be an alien lying in wait. The first contact we see between Yu and an alien invader is against a four-legged spider, which is easily dispatched with one swing of the pipe.

We learn Yu was the subject of experiments mankind hoped would lead to a better future. Those experiments obviously went terribly wrong. "You'll occasionally run into little groups of survivors here and there that have either barricaded themselves in or are calling for help," Bare says. "Right off of the bat, you are like 'What am I doing on this space station? I don't know how I got here or even why. I don't remember anything.' The other question is: 'What are the aliens doing?' They aren't just sitting in rooms waiting for you. They are up to something. Some of the survivors you meet can help or hinder you. You get to choose how you interact with them. How you treat them matters significantly at the end of the game."

Much like Arkane's other hit series, Dishonored, player agency is front and center throughout Prey. You choose your allies, and also Yu's powers and weapons. Arkane wants people to play the game the way they want to.

Since Yu's body has been injected with alien DNA and technology, he can wield many of the same powers as the alien forces – including the ability to mimic objects. He can add to this arsenal by using Neuromods to gain new abilities. Neuromods are injected via a device that shoots alien fluid through the eye into the brain.

"There are some interesting consequences to the skills that you choose," Bare adds. "If you choose to upgrade yourself by inserting alien material into your brain, then things like turrets will begin to recognize you as a threat that isn't human. At first they are on your side and will defend you, but once you start inserting that stuff, they'll think you are alien." Neuromods bring an RPG-like quality to the game, allowing players to enhance and experiment with science, engineering, security, and other types of play styles.

Yu's journey through the space station shows us the aftermath of mankind's experiments. Human bodies are littered throughout the hallways, many torn to shreds. A female voice over the loudspeaker brings a red-alert warning, which was apparently not heeded fast enough. Yu loots one body and finds a pistol. "There are many solutions to puzzles," Bare says. "Weapons are one of them, but weapons are rare." The pistol looks fairly ordinary by today's standards, but includes a digital display revealing how much ammo is left. Yu has 10 rounds.

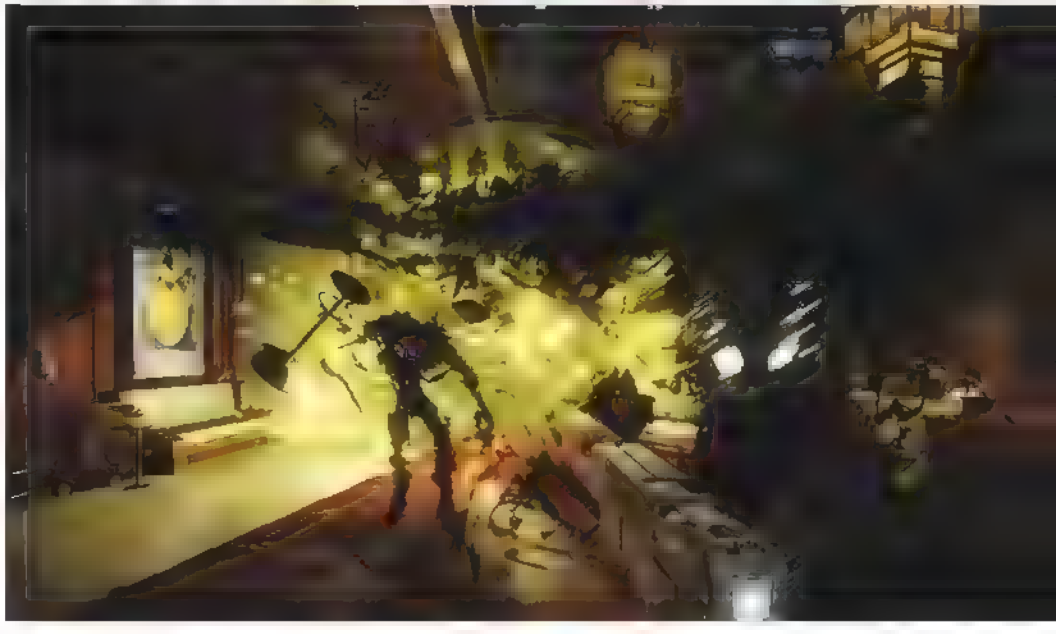
He unloads one of these rounds into another trashcan, an action that brings a big laugh from the QuakeCon crowd. This game is apparently going to make us jittery around ordinary objects. Yu then comes to a locked door. No solution is readily apparent, but he desperately needs to get through the door to find someone named Doctor Calvino, who can potentially answer what went wrong on the station.

Yu studies his surroundings and finds a small, six-inch opening on a counter that looks a little like a bank teller's window. A coffee mug sits on the counter in front of the opening. Using his Mimic power, Yu transforms into the coffee mug, and goofily bounces across the counter like a character you would see in a Disney movie. After bouncing up and down awkwardly, Yu (as the mug) falls over and rolls through the opening, gaining speed as he goes. The mug plummets to the ground and bounces off the floor for a few seconds before Yu transforms back into his human self, now beyond the door.

Clever solutions to environmental puzzles also extend to the weapons. The demo showed off a particular weapon called the Gloo Cannon, which we first see used to spray foam onto a swarm of spiders. The foam instantly freezes them in their tracks, giving Yu all the time he wants to switch to the Gloo's flamethrower functionality to incinerate them all. He then sprays the Gloo Cannon's foam on the wall in a diagonal line, leading from the floor to a balcony above. After the foam freezes, he uses it as a staircase to reach the higher level. We also see this armament used to extinguish the flames on gas pipes, allowing passage into another area.

Almost every body in the game can be looted for parts. They may seem like ordinary things that are being collected, but when fed into a device called the Fabricator, these parts come together to create a useful item. A grenade called the Recycle Charge can be used to mop up items quickly. When a Recycle Charge detonates, it creates a singularity that sucks up objects – and can also be used to spot enemies that may be mimicking other objects.

In this instance, Yu uses the Fabricator to create a zero G Propulsion System, which he quickly tests in a spacewalk moment outside of the station. This part of the game holds a Dead Space-like quality, as Yu navigates floating debris and bodies in an eerie vacuum. His journey along the hull of the station leads to another airlock.



The space station is an open environment, but you need to figure out how to gain access to certain areas. If you repair the elevator, which runs up through the entire station, you gain access to all of those areas.

The entire game is one big mission. "You are moving through the entire space station to accomplish that mission," Bare says. "But you are also free to go off of the rails and do side quests like, 'Oh my god, I just got a call from this guy who is trapped in a cargo container that is floating around the space station, so I'm going to exit the station and space walk over to him to try to rescue him.'"

The demo ends before Yu finds Calvino, but we're left with a taste of how big the aliens can get. A huge black shimmer appears in the distance, almost looking like the silhouette of the Incredible Hulk. The alien rampages forward, knocking anything in its path out of the way with force. It roars, Yu takes aim, and we're left wondering how this conflict may have concluded.

Our first look at Prey was mighty impressive, conjuring instant thoughts of BioShock – not just of mankind's experiments leading to their demise, but from seeing unique concepts emerge in a first-person experience. An official release date hasn't been set, but publisher Bethesda Softworks says we can expect Prey to hit at some point in 2017. » **Andrew Reiner**

Gears Of War 4

Old faces fighting new adversaries

» Pla
Xbox One • PC

»
1 or 2-Player Shooter
(10-Player Online)

»
Microsoft Studios

» **Developer**
The Coalition

»
October 11

Gears of War 4 looks to move one of Xbox's flagship franchises forward in myriad ways. Between the new developer, cast of characters, and primary enemy, the fourth numbered entry is taking the series in fresh directions. However, with series co-creator Rod Fergusson at the helm, The Coalition has shown it is always thinking about ways to tie back to the classic entries that put Gears of War on the map at the same time. This is evident when you play the game, as well as when you look at how The Coalition is handling the story and the modes on offer.

Gears of War 4 signals the return of the beloved Horde mode. With this third iteration of the wave-based survival mode, The Coalition is giving players more control over how they push through the mode's 50 waves by letting them establish their base of operations wherever they want in the map.

"One of the things that people used to develop deeper strategies [in Gears of War 2's Horde mode] was shields to exploit certain aspects of the A.I. to survive longer," lead multiplayer designer Ryan Cleven says. "What we wanted to do was to take all of those fortifications that could help you, but now put them in the hands of players to really find the best way to defend themselves and not have it predetermined by us."

Instead of those pre-designated areas for building fortifications, The Coalition has put a device called The Fabricator in the middle of the map. The team picks up that device and plants it wherever they want the center of their defenses to be.

The Fabricator lets players build more fortifications by providing them with a menu of turrets, sentry guns, and more. Players can then place those fortifications wherever they want.

Cleven hopes players use this newfound freedom to come up with creative approaches. "You can try to exploit whatever you can think of," he says. "You can try to stack them on top of each other, you can build lots of one kind… you can do all sorts of different things to try to find the best way to manipulate the A.I. to achieve higher scores. We're super excited to see what players can come up with."

In addition, players can choose from five distinct classes (soldier, scout, sniper, engineer, and heavy), which can be leveled up between matches. Rather than these classes containing fixed specialties, Horde 3.0 gives players different skills to choose from as they progress. Depending on your level, the class has five unlockable skill slots to house the 10 or 11 unique skills available for that class.

At E3, The Coalition revealed Marcus Fenix, the protagonist of the original Gears of War trilogy and father of Gears of War 4 protagonist JD Fenix, would appear in the game in some capacity. When I played the San Diego Comic-Con campaign demo, it became clear that Marcus is more than just a character who appears in cutscenes, he joined my squad for the duration of the demo.

"You can see from the way that he talks in the squad that he's not a one-and-done part of the game, but you can also see from other stuff we've shown that he's not always there," says lead campaign designer Matt Searcy. "We have this new squad, but we wanted to tie their roots back to the old squad as well. Marcus is a big way that we can do that."

As my squad moves out, the

characters remark that a wind-flare is about to kick up, so they have to be fast about seeking shelter. The team decides on the service tower in the distance, but nothing can be as easy as moving from point-A to point-B. The squad is ambushed by members of the Swarm, the new threat facing the characters in this game.

The early encounters are standard Gears fare; waist-high pods and walls fill the battlefield as the two sides exchange fire from behind cover. Before long, the wind-flare hits and changes everything. Safe cover deteriorates as Sera's violent weather system wreaks havoc on the combat zone. What was once a safe haven turns into a wide-open area, and I'm left a sitting duck. I try to make it to the nearest cover, but running into the fierce wind kills my momentum and slows me down.

The chaos spreads as the wind rages on. As I kill Swarm soldiers, they ragdoll and blow away. The wind is a constant reminder of Sera's state, as even when wind-flares don't affect gameplay, players witness damage from past windstorms.

The effect the weather has on battles is never more evident than when lightning strikes begin raining down death and destruction onto the warzone. I use the lightning to my advantage by letting it destroy the enemies in front of me, but once the field is clear the lightning quickly becomes my most pressing issue.

The lightning touches down in one deadly blast before that strike branches off in multiple arcs in my direction. I get too close and the lightning knocks down a chunk of my health. I'm told had that happened on higher difficulty, I would have seen a much more substantial amount of health knocked off, with touching lightning on the highest difficulty even spelling instant death. My squad makes it to the door, but just as we open it the storm tears the tower apart and my demo ends.

The Swarm is a menacing replacement for the Locusts as a primary threat, but a new faction of adversaries was also recently announced. In addition to dealing with the grotesque Swarm, the team is charged with taking on the DeeBees, security robots designed by the COG to prevent the low human population from further endangering itself in the raging storms of Sera.

"We did a lot of work on them to see if we can make it as satisfying to head-shot a DeeBee as it is to head-shot a Locust or a Swarm, and what it feels like when they blow up," Searcy says. "Just making sure that simple things like when you chainsaw a guy that it's got that same kind of satisfying pop even if it's oil and sparks instead of blood."

Over the course of the campaign, players encounter different classes of DeeBees. From variances on the standard infantry bot known as the Shepherd, to distinct kinds of mobile sentry turrets known as Guardians, the DeeBees introduce several new enemy types for JD and his squad to face off against.

Each time I get a new look at Gears of War 4, it makes me more excited to play the final release. The new squad has a great dynamic, the story and the world intrigue me, and Horde mode sounds refined in all the right ways. As someone who was lukewarm on Judgment, I'm hopeful Gears of War 4 is the continuation of the series I've been waiting for. » **Brian Shea**

[illegible] Bring New Weaponry

With the introduction of the new robotic DeeBee faction of enemies, Gears of War 4 players also get a new collection of weapons to play with.

The Enforcer
An SMG with an incredible fire-rate and fast reload time.

EMBAR
A scope-less rifle that lets you charge your shot by holding the trigger, giving you a window to deal massive damage

Overkill
An extremely powerful shotgun that has two shots in each shell, when you pull the trigger, the first shot fires, with the second shot discharging when you release the trigger. Because it's so powerful, it's treated more like a power weapon than a standard shotgun.

Tri-Shot
A heavy chaingun that has three separate barrels that overheat in order. When all three are firing, it devastates anything it's pointed at.

RL-4 Salvo
A rapid-firing rocket launcher

Resident Evil 7: Biohazard

A dramatic and disquieting departure from form

» **Platforms**
PlayStation 4
Xbox One • PC

» **Style**
1-Player Action

» **Publisher**
Capcom

» **Developer**
Capcom

» **Release**
January 24

We don't know what to make of Resident Evil 7. Many fans have been eagerly anticipating a real sequel to Resident Evil 6. More importantly, they have been pleading for something that undoes the perceived damage that title did to the franchise, bringing it back to something closer to the Resident Evil remake.

Heedless of those desires, Capcom is clearly going in a different direction for its next numbered entry. On one hand, Resident Evil 7 is not the action shoot-fest fans maligned its predecessor for being. But the upcoming game also doesn't appear to be a return to the franchise's roots.

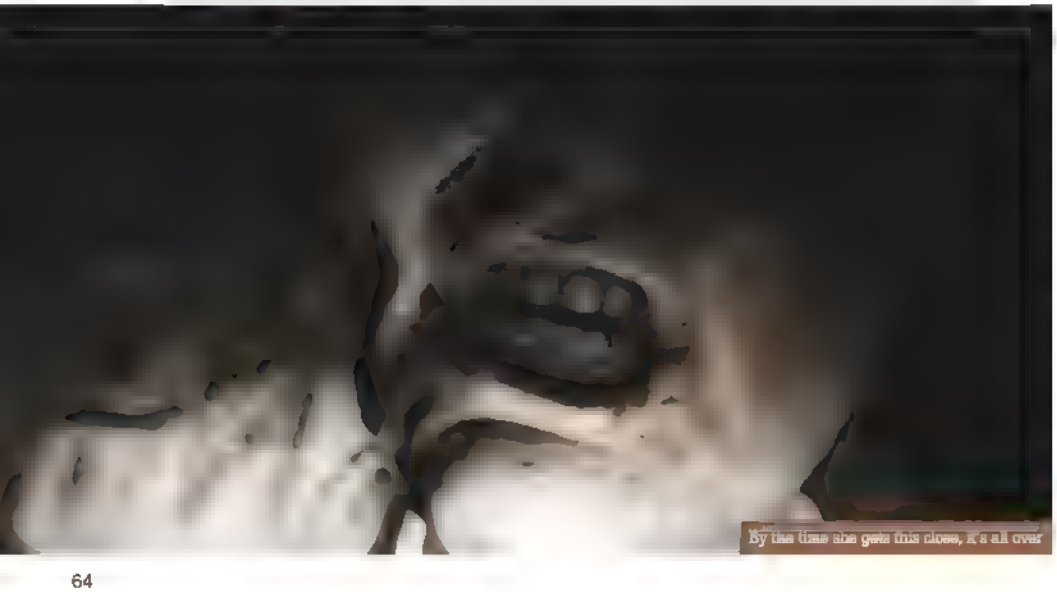
Instead, this first-person exploration game is closer in tone and execution to Outlast or Amnesia. Unfortunately, early demos have failed to capture the same tension and terror of the games it's emulating.

During E3, Capcom made a short playable teaser called "Beginning Hour" available for download. While not at all related to the established Resident Evil story, it served as a "tonal demo" so fans could understand what to expect. That same structure governs our latest hands-on preview.

A new demo, called Lantern, is one of Resident Evil 7's many found-footage segments. We got a taste of this in Beginning Hour, as the protagonist discovered a VHS tape and popped it in a VCR. In this new video, a girl named Mia is on the run from the stalking Marguerite Baker. We know Mia is not the protagonist, as Capcom has already revealed the lead character is male. As Marguerite hunts Mia with her swinging lantern casting light and shadow on the decrepit swamp shack, we hear her hurl invectives at the terrified girl.

Unfortunately, Mia's fright didn't translate while playing. The jump scares are predictable, and hiding behind a box for an extended period of time wasn't intense or fun. The short demo features one simple shadow puzzle, in which we rotated a stone sculpture to match an outline. This is the most familiar element of the experience.

As Mia explores the house, candles



By the time she gets this close, it's all over

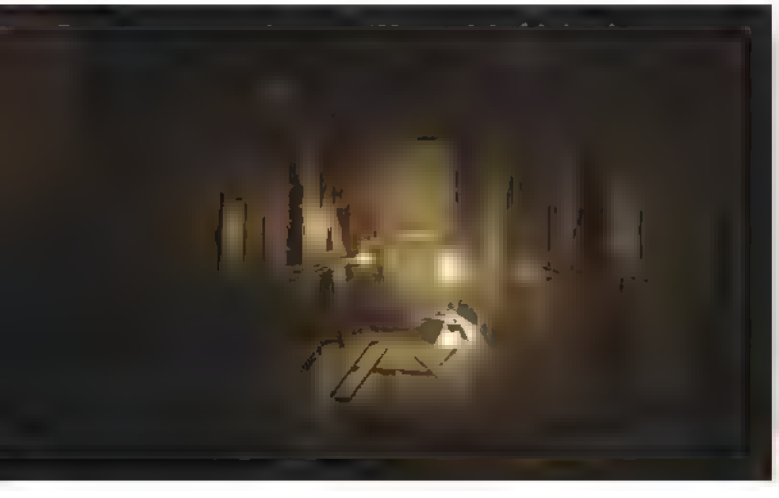
Sadly, the demo we played doesn't include any combat

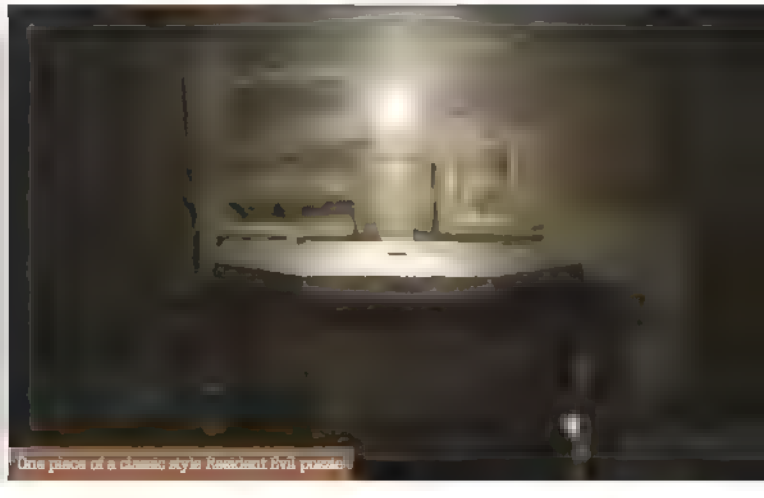
are snuffed out by an invisible presence, doors are suddenly closed, and there's a sense that Marguerite isn't the only thing hunting the girl. Much of the time is spent looking for a place to hide and creeping around boxes to stay out of sight. Sadly, the end of the footage is predictable. The lights go out, and when they come on, Marguerite is an inch from Mia's face. She pounces, Mia screams, and the girl is dragged away.

These found-footage segments, some of which are optional, are related to the main story. We're told there is a narrative tie between what happens in the videos and what the protagonist will be uncovering. What isn't clear is whether there will be a causal relationship between actions taken during those VHS segments and what happens in the "real world." Perhaps more importantly, as yet another piece of apparent side content, this latest demo still fails to answer much about the core gameplay, characters, and setting of the game.

Capcom still has time before the impending January launch to explain more fully how this game connects to the established Resident Evil lore. At the same time, it should better frame its design choices, which are wildly different than anything series fans have ever looked for in the franchise. Until that becomes clear, it's hard to know what to expect from Resident Evil 7. We're still optimistic that there might be central elements of the game we have yet to witness, but what we've seen so far hasn't wowed us.

» **Mike Futter**




One piece of a classic style Resident Evil puzzle

Titanfall 2

Trading grim for goof

Platform
PlayStation 4
Xbox One • PC

Style
1-Player Shooter
(16-Player Online)

Publisher
Electronic Arts

Developer
Respawn Entertainment

Release
October 28

The original Titanfall launched nearly two years ago and made good on its frenzied promise, dropping players into futuristic battlefields and letting them zip around apartments and hollowed-out factories as speedy warriors capable of calling down giant mechs to do their bidding. However, a large faction of would-be players felt left out in the cold because of Titanfall's lack of a campaign. When Respawn revealed that the second game would deliver a single-player experience, a roar of excitement was soon replaced by questions. How would the developer craft a single-player experience out of a game that's defined by its action-packed multiplayer moments? For the past few months, Respawn's kept mostly quiet on the specifics of Titanfall 2's campaign until now.

At a private press event, Respawn showed off a 20-minute demo of the campaign, revealing the setup of the story as well as a lengthy demonstration of gameplay. You play as Jack Cooper, a militia rifleman who dreams of becoming a pilot, under the tutelage of a mentor pilot. Things go awry during a military op called Operation Broadsword. You crash-land on a planet teeming with dangerous wildlife and watch as your mentor slowly dies before you, but not before giving you his suit and access to his Titan, BT.

During the presentation, I saw several segments where Cooper and BT work together, though most of the demo was centered on Cooper himself, with BT somewhere else. The majority of these segments suggested an open-ended style of first-person shooter gameplay akin to that of Far Cry or Crysis in small, narrow spaces that you might find in Call of Duty. An early sequence showed Cooper sneaking into a camp filled with patrolling enemies. The demoer managed to take out three enemies

In Titanfall 2, skilled players can make their speedy pilots just as deadly as the lumbering Titans

quietly with the assistance of a cloaking suit before being spotted, though that wasn't too much of a hassle, with every enemy going down pretty quickly thanks to Cooper's quick movements and the spray of his submachine gun.

These action set pieces are also complemented by puzzles tied to Titanfall's parkour system. For example, one sequence had Cooper using a crane to move a piece of wall around an oil rig-like structure so he could reach different sections of the rig. Another level, taking place in a robot manufacturing plant, had him using a tool called an Arc Thrower to open up doors and operate devices that help him reach closed-off places to progress through the plant.

Only one section of the demo actually had Cooper inside his Titan, and it looked similar to the Titan gameplay of multiplayer matches in the first game, with the player zooming around the battlefield, using a host of weapons and abilities to take down foes. The enemies in this section were automated titans called Reapers and put up quite a fight. When the demoer took down all of them, a titan controlled by a pilot named Richter, complete with a hilarious Schwarzenegger imitation accent, dropped down to carry on the fight, though the demo ended right before we could see the two Titans go at it.

Perhaps the most surprising quality of Titanfall 2's campaign is how ludicrous and zany it is. The snippets of lore in the original game, always playing in the background, suggest a grim world with human beings actively seeking to destroy each other. Titanfall 2 doesn't do away with that, but its approach to storytelling is much more colorful and less dour than we expected. A handful of scenes focusing on BT and Cooper's conversations, with you controlling Cooper's side of the conversation with a dialogue wheel, had the entire room laughing. The relationship between Cooper and BT seems genuinely interesting, and it's difficult to predict how their journey together will unfold during the course of the campaign.

Aside from the demonstration of the promising campaign, we also spent a few hours with multiplayer, including a new mode called Bounty Hunt. In Bounty Hunt, waves of A.I.-controlled enemies spawn and both teams surge toward them to take them out to earn cash. Between waves, a handful of banks open up on every map where players can deposit the money they've earned. Opposing players who are killed get the amount of money they're carrying on them significantly reduced. Whichever team has the most money at the end of the match wins. The mode is exhilarating and makes contributions by players who aren't necessarily good at PvP valuable because they can spend the match picking off A.I. enemies and rushing to the bank to boost their team's score.

At its core, Titanfall 2 multiplayer is more or less the same experience as the first with minor alterations. For example, when you jockey an enemy Titan, you don't fire continuously into a weak spot to do damage but instead rip out a battery that represents a segment of that Titan's health and hop off. With the new handy grapple hook, you can string together jockeying combos to do massive damage if you're quick enough. The grapple also lets you reach far away destinations and deal one-hit kills to enemy pilots if you can connect the grapple to them, which is easier said than done. These enhancements and additions, small as they are, come together to make what was already a great multiplayer experience even more promising.

Set to release in October, Titanfall 2 is right around the corner, and will have a tough fight ahead of it given just how shooter-heavy this year's fall release schedule is. However, from what we've seen, this sequel might just end up being that all too rare game with single-player and multiplayer components that are equally compelling in vastly different ways.

» Javy Gwaltney

Each Titan has a special arsenal and skillset that sets them apart from other Titans

Call Of Duty: Infinite Warfare

Enter the neon death machine

» **Platforms**
PlayStation 4
Xbox One • PC

» **Style**
1 or 2-Player Shooter
(12-Player Online)

» **Publisher**
Activision

» **Developer**
Infinity Ward

» **Release**
November 4

Call of Duty's Zombies mode used to be a staple of Treyarch's contributions to the long-running franchise. In recent years, Activision has made it the official third pillar of the titanic series.

Sledgehammer put its own spin on things with Exo-zombies in Call of Duty: Advanced Warfare. Now, Infinity Ward gets into the action with Zombies in Spaceland. The neon-infused romp brings four archetypical characters into an '80s-style amusement park filled to the brim with the undead.

The cast includes a number of familiar names, including *Robot Chicken*'s Seth Green, *Neighbors*' Ike Barinholtz, and *Saturday Night Live*'s Jay Pharoah and Sasheer Zamata as the nerd, jock, rapper, and Valley girl. Paul Reubens and David Hasselhoff also make special appearances.

Reubens plays the villain, a washed-up film director who has made a deal with the devil for another chance at stardom. In order to make his masterpiece, he needs to entrap hapless victims and steal their souls. To accomplish this sinister task, he lures the quartet of heroes to his home to show them his old films. When he plays *Zombies in Spaceland*, they are sucked into the film's flashy, neon theme park.

Once there, the group meets up with the park's DJ, played by Hasselhoff. He, too, is a victim hoping to escape. To while away the hours, he spins a soundtrack of '80s classics. Players can "make requests," including skipping tracks and switching genres entirely.

In addition to classic four-player cooperative gameplay, Zombies in Spaceland brings some new features. The "fate and fortune" system allows players to choose five different power-up cards before each game. These are charged through accomplishing regular actions, like boarding windows, unlocking doors, and killing the undead.

Once charged, these powerful cards can turn the tide of battle, for example spawning a nuke right in front of the player. Once used, they're gone for the match, but can be replenished by visiting a fortune teller and spending some of your hard-earned in-game cash.

You can also spend your zombie-killing bucks on the amusement rides, which are devilish traps in disguise. These can be used to clear out large swaths of the undead with style.

All of this comes together as a blend of familiar and new. Infinity Ward's take on Zombies has a different flair, and we're eager to see how slaying the undead looks in neon. » **Mike Futter**

Quake Champions

Introducing the heroes

Quake Champions was rightfully the last game featured at Bethesda's welcoming festivities at QuakeCon 2016. Id Software's Tim Willits excitedly took the stage to show off the game in action, beginning with a demo demonstrating just how fast the game can get. The demo character bounced across platforms rapidly, an action that made people in attendance roar with applause. Willits also showed off the return of the rocket jump, which also brought giggles from the crowd. Apparently, people attending QuakeCon really like Quake.

The presentation moved just as fast as the characters in the game, revealing that fan-favorite weapons are coming back, such as the shotgun, rocket launcher, nail gun, lightning gun, machine gun, and, well, pretty much all of them. Quake Champions' environments, while looking retro in their layouts, feature stunning details, such as sunbeams shimmering off of rocky walls, waterfalls pouring in the distance, and disturbing touches like a giant eyeball chained to the floor in the basement of an area. The game runs on a hybrid engine designed by id Software and Saber Interactive. The combat moves much faster than the recently released Doom, but doesn't look like a reinvention of the series. One look at the game and most gamers should be able to tell you exactly what it is.

Platform
PC

» Style
Online Shooter

Publisher
Bethesda Softworks

» Developer
id Software,
Saber Interactive

Release
2017

While designed to deliver the action Quake players know and love, Willits says Quake Champions adds unique powers tied to each character in the game. The ranger, for instance, can teleport, whereas a new character named Scalebearer can smash other characters to bits using a bull-charge Quake Champions' beta hits next year with over a dozen playable characters, and more will be added as it is tested.

"A lot of people say hero shooters are everywhere," Willits told us earlier this year at E3. "Yes, that's true, but I truly believe it's a natural evolution of the genre. You have your core gameplay – the things that make the game great – and then adding personality, abilities, and differences to these individual characters allow you to play differently and adds a layer of gameplay."

The addition of champions was met with skepticism by the crowd, many of which voiced fear that the new hero abilities will throw off the combat balance. A character like Visor appears to have a clear advantage on the battlefield with his ability to track enemies through walls. Bethesda and Willits are adamant that champions won't ruin the core experience, and should only expand its scope for players and eSports competitions. We'll find out next spring when the beta hits. Willits says the beta will be as long as it needs to be, and adjustments will be made throughout. "We got to get it right," he says. "Otherwise we're dead in the water." » **Andrew Reiner**

Watch Dogs 2

Chaotic new multiplayer mode introduces bounty hunting hackers

» **Platform**
PlayStation 4
Xbox One • PC

» **Style**
1-Player Action
(4-Player Online)

» **Publisher**
Ubisoft

» **Developer**
Ubisoft Montreal

» **Release**
November 15

Ubisoft hopes Watch Dogs 2 is a more enthralling experience than its predecessor, introducing the hacker world of San Francisco and placing us in the shoes of new protagonist Marcus Holloway. With his keen sense of justice and his affiliation with the hacker faction DedSec, he aims to expose corruption and take down Blume, the creators of the advanced computer system ctOS 2.0, which controls metropolitan cities.

At Gamescom, we got a better look at co-op and multiplayer. Watch Dogs 2 has a seamless online world, meaning other players and their experiences seep into your campaign. You see other players as DedSec members, and you can meet up with friends to participate in co-op missions. Even as the police chase you, this seeps into other players' worlds, and they can join in, attempting to hunt you down.

Bounty Hunter is a new multiplayer PvP mode coming to the series. Matches are 2v2 or 3v1 sessions, which includes co-op with friends. This exhilarating game of cat and mouse begins when you have a bounty on your head. The mode can be triggered by creating a high level of destruction and chaos in the world or by selecting a command in your phone to place the bounty manually. Either way, this forces the police after you, along with a few players who want to kill you on sight.

In Watch Dogs 2, hacking is more accessible through quick hacks, which are activated by the press of a button. Quick hacks are fundamental to your success in Bounty Hunter. For example, during car chases you can spin your target's vehicle out of control by remotely accessing their steering wheel, or you can slow down pursuers by creating a steam pipe explosion or messing with traffic lights, similar to the previous game. Temporary speed boosts help you catch an assailant, or aid you to break the line of sight as you swerve around corners. While these are great assets, be warned that hacks can be used against you, too.

Successful evasion from a pursuer grants you points. Both bounty hunters and targets also rack up points by killing opposing team members. Bounty Hunter affects your story progression, as it earns you more DedSec followers depending on your performance.

Those that don't want to participate in seamless online multiplayer can opt out. From what we played of Bounty Hunter, it is an enjoyable new PvP mode with intense car chases and gunfights. We look forward to seeing what else Watch Dogs 2's online modes have to offer. » Elise Favis

Watch Dogs 2 introduces a new multiplayer mode called Bounty Hunter, where a group of players work together to hunt down a target player as the hunter or the hunted.

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Dragon Quest Builders

Like Minecraft, but with Dragon Quest

» [redacted]
PlayStation 4 • Vita

» Style
1-Player Action

» [redacted]
Square Enix

» [redacted]
Square Enix

» [redacted]
October 11

In North America, Dragon Quest is known nearly as much for its spin-offs as its core RPGs. Games like Rocket Slime and the recent Dragon Quest Warriors prove the series' memorable art and consistent world are capable of living outside of the RPG genre. If our early impressions are any indication, Builders has the potential of being another quality entry in Dragon Quest's expanding non-RPG portfolio.

Dragon Quest Builders borrows heavily from Minecraft, but features Dragon Quest art, monsters, and even shares some loose ties with the very first Dragon Quest game's story. Builders represents an alternate universe where good did not overcome evil and it's up to you, an engineer/warrior gifted with the power of creation, to bring light back to a dark, monster-ridden world.

You start by picking a boy or a girl and a name before being dropped into a world you can break apart into materials to be rebuilt in any way you choose. You start with a simple structure, beating the ground with a stick to produce dirt blocks, which can then be stacked into something resembling a dwelling. Add a bed and torch to your room, and you've got yourself a home. This attracts another resident seeking refuge from the darkness, and your mission becomes more defined: You must build a city.

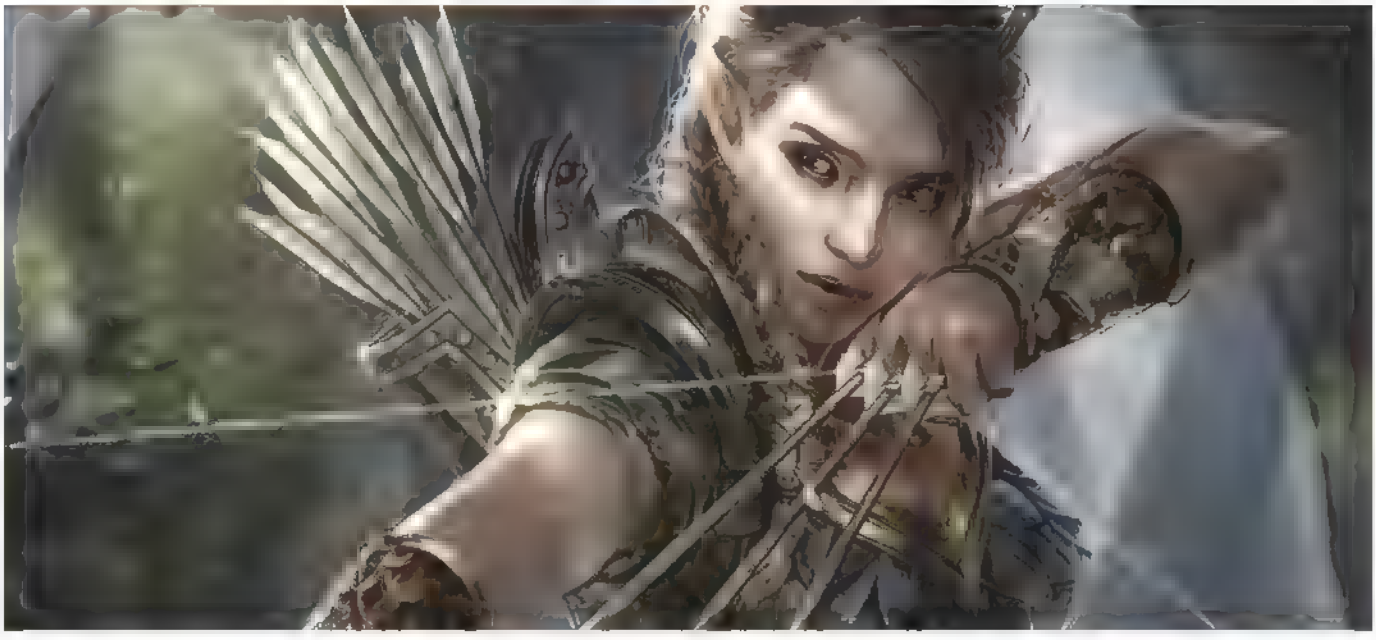
Builders' mechanics sound remarkably close to Minecraft, but they are distinct in some important ways. For one, the game is exclusively third-person. You see your character as he or she fights monsters, breaks things apart, and builds structures. It also means your houses don't need roofs, because it would be difficult to track your character once they go inside. It's a strange by-product of moving out of the first-person perspective, but it appears to never rain in the world despite ever-present dark clouds in the distance.

Builders also has direction. You're free to explore on your own, but you won't get very far without listening to and completing the requests of your residents. This is how you get recipes to make new items, bring more people into your young city, and move forward in the story. Having a list of objectives is welcome, especially for those who get overwhelmed with Minecraft's freedom. It also feels appropriate considering Dragon Quest's RPG roots.

I'm surprised more games like Dragon Quest Builders, which meld Minecraft's popular mechanics with an established franchise, don't already exist. After spending a few hours with Builders, it feels like a good fit. I enjoyed building and exploring the open world with a Dragon Quest aesthetic, and was eager to listen to my community's requests. Builders met praise when it released in Japan earlier this year, and after my time with the game I can see why. » **Kyle Hilliard**

The Elder Scrolls: Legends

A strategy-oriented approach to a familiar universe



The digital card-game market is bursting at the seams, but that isn't stopping Bethesda from diving into the mix with one of its highly recognizable IPs. Daedric nightmares, stealthy Khajiit, burly Nords and legends from across Skyrim and Daggerfall make their appearances in card form in an easy-to-earn format that will be familiar for Hearthstone veterans, but has its own mechanics and flavor to distance itself from Blizzard's powerhouse.

Players create decks from one or two of the game's five "attributes," which sync up with stats from the series like strength, intelligence, and endurance. Even in the core set, you can find plenty of interesting synergies, like building around Breton ward troops that keep giving benefits when their damage shields pop or thieving Khajiit that get stronger each time they hit the opponent.

Gameplay takes place on two lanes, the standard lane and the shadow lane. The standard lane is nothing special, but creatures played in the shadow lane can't be attacked for a turn, making it the ideal location for frail denizens with powerful abilities or creatures that benefit from directly landing blows on your opponent. You are limited to four creatures in a lane, so choosing where and when to place your units becomes a critical part of strategy.

Elder Scrolls: Legends contains a subset of cards that use something called the prophecy mechanic. These are generally slightly less powerful than cards that would cost the same resources to play, but can be played for free if they are drawn when one of your runes burst. Each player has runes tied to their life total, and when five points of damage are dealt, a rune is triggered and the player draws a card. This means if you're taking a lot of damage and falling behind in the life race, you'll have more cards and potentially free cards to fire off on the board immediately, taking care of major threats or putting up defenses to weather the assault. Whether or not you want to use prophecy cards is an important element of deck-building.

A full single-player campaign that also functions as a robust tutorial, solo and multiplayer arenas, and ranked ladder seasons offer players a variety of ways to obtain cards at a reasonable pace. While cards packs are available for purchase, savvy players will have little issue creating competitive decks at no cost through daily quests, level-up rewards, and campaign freebies.

The Elder Scrolls: Legends is currently available in a "probably won't be wiped" open beta stage, but it feels like it's almost complete. There may be some tweaks, balancing, and other things coming before the final release, but now is a great time to jump in if the mix of a digital card game and the Elder Scrolls universe strikes your fancy.

» Daniel Tack

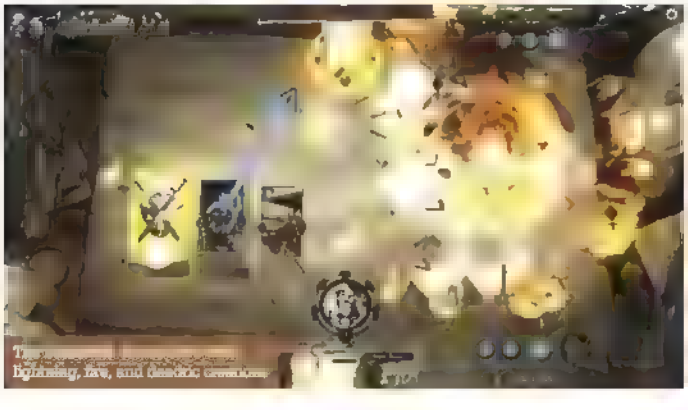
[redacted]
PC • iOS

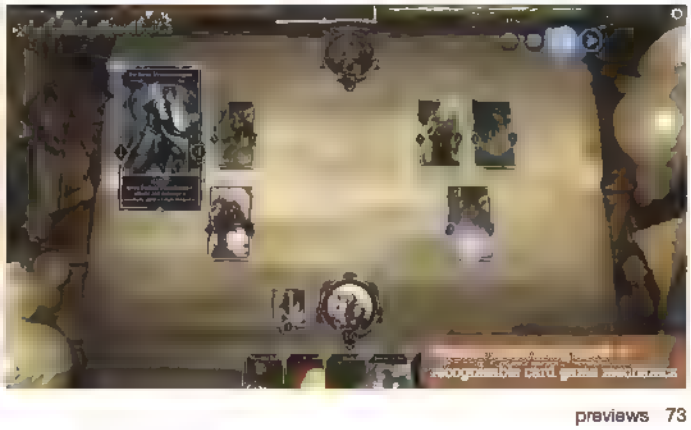
» **Style**
1-Player Strategy

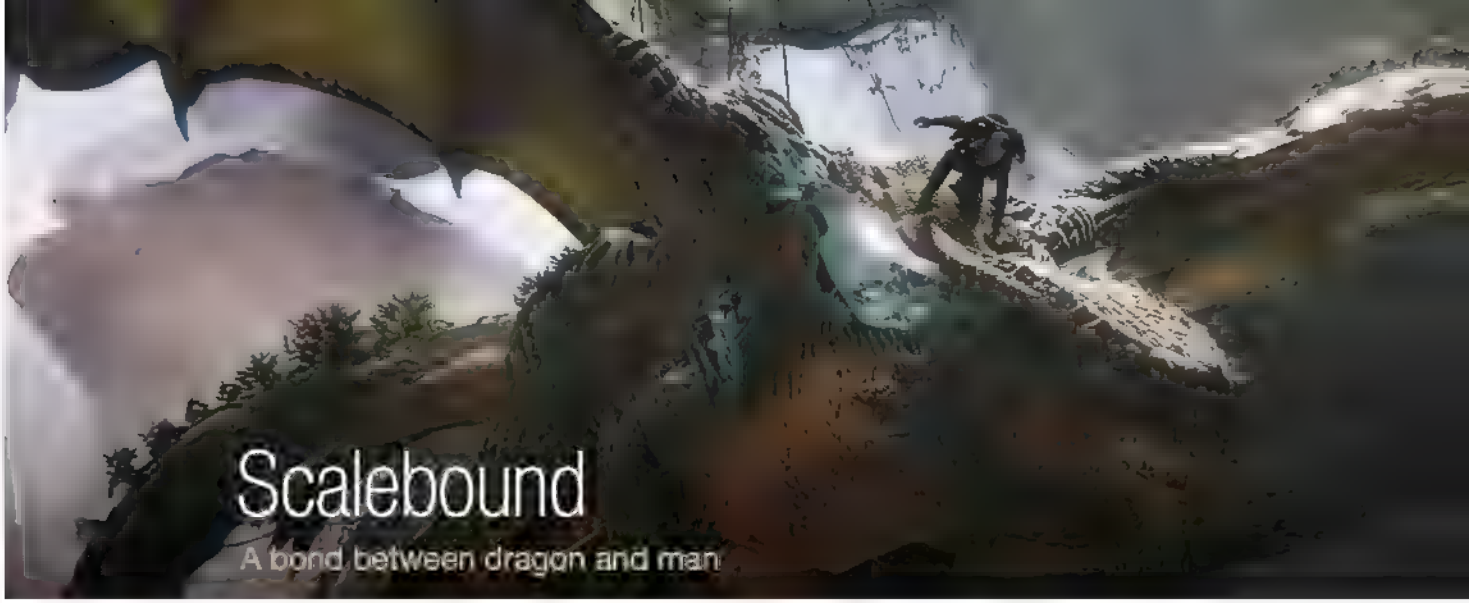
» **Publisher**
Bethesda Softworks

» **Developer**
Dire Wolf Digital

[redacted]
2016







Scalebound

A bond between dragon and man

» **Platform**
Xbox One • PC

» **Style**
1-Player Action/Role-Playing (4-Player Online)

» **Publisher**
Microsoft Studios

» **Developer**
Platinum Games

» **Release**
2017

Scalebound's unique premise, which blends fantasy and modernity, caught the attention of fans when it was first announced two years ago. This action/RPG tells the story of Drew, a headphone-wearing teenager who finds himself in the world of Draconis. As he bonds with a dragon named Theban, they work side by side to take down beastly enemies as they uncover the secrets of this world.

At Gamescom, we got a behind-the-scenes look at Platinum Games' Scalebound, a change of pace for the developer known for fast-paced action games such as Bayonetta. Scalebound still has its fair of flashy action, but with more of a focus on role-playing elements. We saw Drew and Theban go head-to-head with a monstrous beast in our demo. Through Dragon Link – a sharing of consciousness between both characters – players directly control Theban's powerful attacks and maneuvers from Drew's perspective. Whenever you're not using Dragon Link, the A.I. controls Theban.

After defeating each enemy, you collect gems that can be put toward customization options and upgrades for your dragon. These changes can be done at dragon shrines around the world. You can apply additional attack buffs, change armor, and morph your dragon into a more powerful hybrid. Three base dragon types exist, including the well-balanced Rex, the tank dragon, and Wyvern, who excels in air

Two irresistible flavors

Winner Chocolate Category
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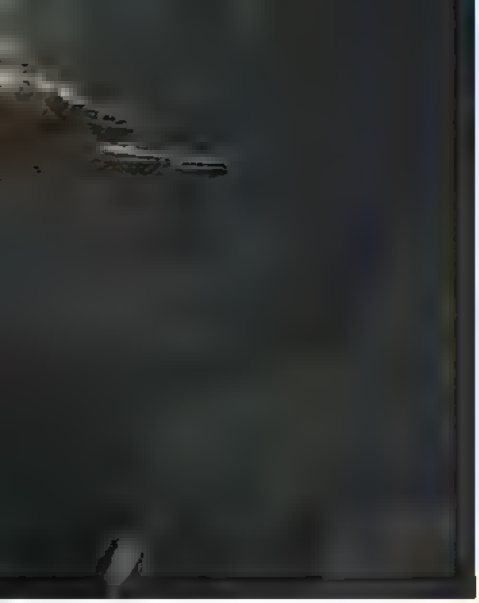

You can customize your dragon with armor, attack buffs, and even morph it into a hybrid breed.

attacks but is weaker than the others.

The ability to morph your dragon is a neat touch, and Platinum Games suggests the customization is deep enough to provide unique dragons that differ in play style and appearance.

"The goal we have for this system is that eventually you're going to arrive at the perfect dragon for you," says creative producer J.P. Kellams. "When you're playing in multiplayer, it's very likely that your dragon and my dragon will be totally different." ■ Elise Favis

under 200 calories.

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Urban Empire

City building gets political

» Platform
PC

» Style
1-Player Strategy

» Publisher
Kalypso

» Developer
Fragment Production Ltd.

» Release
Early 2017

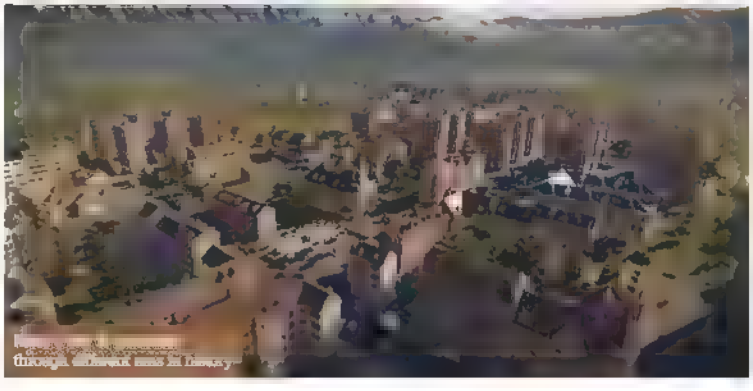
If you take Sim City, combine it with Civilization, and then add a big dose of political intrigue and voting mechanics, you're somewhere in the ball park of Urban Empire. The game gives you control of a familial dynasty to guide from the era of gas lamps to modern day. Along the way, you build up your city with special buildings, classic residential, industrial, and commercial areas (and "mixed" zones of buildings). But one of the most important aspects takes a different approach to the classic city-building sim, and that's the world of politics.

Urban Empire features only one way to lose: failing your bid for re-election. Much of the intrigue comes from participating in the town council. Everything from getting funding for new projects to blackmailing political opponents for their valuable votes comes into play here, making it the major crux of the experience. Whether you want to stack the deck by having everyone owe you favors or just bully your political opponents into submission with dirty tricks, Urban Empire features multiple ways to approach your political career. Persuasion options include flattery, bribery, threats, and even digging up dirt on your opposition's families and private lives to either expose them or keep them in your pocket.

Your work in the town council goes toward making your city a safer, happier, and more efficient place, as do the many technology trees your family can access as the eras pass. Gas-lamp technology, for instance, places cool-looking light around your city as soon as it's researched, providing not only some nice views into the habits of your citizens during the evening but also increasing your overall safety level.

As mayor, you make the tough choices related to issues like child-labor laws and women's suffrage – all while trying to keep your political rivals from successfully ousting you from office and building up your city to new heights of greatness.

Urban Empire looks to be an interesting genre blend, and I'm looking forward to seeing what shady deals and silver-tongues can achieve for my great city. » **Daniel Tack**



Sonic Mania

Looking forward to going backward

In the early '90s, Sonic the Hedgehog was in constant competition with Mario for the platforming crown. Unfortunately, as gaming made the leap to 3D and Sega migrated away from the hardware business, Sonic struggled to find his footing and saw vast inconsistencies in the quality of titles released. With the Blue Blur's 25th anniversary landing in 2016, Sega is collaborating with indie developers PagodaWest, Headcannon, and Christian Whitehead for a retro-style game that aims to get the speedster back on track and shows more promise than any recent title in the series.

You'd be forgiven for looking at Sonic Mania and thinking you were staring at a Genesis-era Sonic game. The sprite-based visuals feel ripped straight from Sonic's most classic entries, and the animations even mirror those of that time period. I loved watching Sonic rev up his spin-dash to plow through groups of enemies and seeing the rings go flying when he gets hit by a baddie.

In past attempts to make modern releases in the franchise feel retro, recent Sonic games have fallen short of the greatness of past entries. Titles like Sonic 4, which were supposed to be true successors to the Genesis games, failed to capture that classic feel. Thankfully, this isn't a problem with Sonic Mania, as the gameplay feels true to the games many of us grew up with. The feeling of building up momentum to go around a loop feels just like it did in my favorite games in the series, and even things like bouncing upward on a spring felt right.

Sonic Mania features a mix of new zones and familiar locales with new twists. I played two levels during my time with the title. The first was one anyone who's picked up a Genesis controller is likely familiar with: Green Hill Zone. The level starts off exactly as it did in the 1991 Sonic the Hedgehog, but it quickly becomes apparent that this isn't some copy-and-paste job. Though many of the paths feel familiar, the level branches out to include new areas to explore. The stage also throws in an all-new boss battle featuring two spherical robots attached by a chain.

I also played through a new futuristic film-themed area called Studiopolis Zone. This level was much more dynamic and focused more on platforming than all-out speed. Even so, I still had several sections where I picked up so much speed that the camera couldn't keep up – a nice homage to similar moments that occurred at times in the Genesis games.

As part of the back-to-basics approach, Sonic Mania leaves out all of the series' peripheral characters. Instead of choosing from a bloated roster, you can control the three mainstay characters: Sonic, Tails, and Knuckles.

Due to the recent track record of the Sonic the Hedgehog series, I'm still approaching Sonic Mania with caution. However, based on what I played, this game could be a true return to form for the series. » **Brian Shea**

[redacted]
PlayStation 4
Xbox One • PC

» Style
1-Player Platforming

» Publisher
Sega

» Developer
PagodaWest,
Headcannon,
Christian Whitehead

[redacted]
Spring

The developers of Sonic Mania have previously worked on porting some of the classic Sonic games to modern platforms

Metal Gear Survive

Konami takes Metal Gear in an unexpected direction

» **Platform**
PlayStation 4
Xbox One • PC

» **Style**
1-Player Action
(4-Player Online)

» **Publisher**
Konami

» **Developer**
Konami

» **Release**
2017

The Metal Gear franchise has a certain goofiness to it, but it's supported by a solid foundation of stealth and espionage. At Gamescom, Konami announced Metal Gear Survive, a stark departure from the series that no one expected and many are finding difficult to grasp.

Metal Gear Survive takes place after the events of Metal Gear Solid V: Ground Zeroes but before The Phantom Pain. Mother Base was destroyed and the stranded MSF soldiers were left to die – or so we thought. According to Metal Gear Survive, an unexplained wormhole opened up, transporting these soldiers to an alternate universe.

This new world has a desert-like terrain, and is where four players team up online to fight hordes of mindless zombies that Konami calls "living biological threats." Several pieces of debris and damaged structures that used to hold Mother Base together fell into this wormhole. These pieces of concrete and metal act as makeshift shelters to aid you in your struggle for survival.

"The environment itself is treacherous, everything seems dangerous and trying to kill you," says Konami brand manager Richard Jones. "Half-formed structures and components of Mother Base have been falling through these portals and are stuck here in the sand, and these places will act as shelter for you."

While the trailer is action-packed, Konami reassured us that stealth continues to play a large role in Metal Gear Survive. "You need to work together in co-op, as well as utilizing stealth mechanics, which pertain to the series, in order to survive," Jones says. "You work together, sneaking around enemies, making distractions."

Jones says players also must master new weaponry, though he stopped short of confirming what these weapons will be. While the cinematic trailer released at Gamescom doesn't demonstrate any actual gameplay, it showed a few of the weapons the team may have at their disposal – an explosive, spinning bow and arrow, a spear, and a shotgun.

Unfortunately, Konami refused to divulge any more details about the game at its Gamescom presentation, even as we pressed them further. Metal Gear Survive is slated for release next year, so expect more intel to surface in the coming months. » **Elise Favis**

Dragon Ball Xenoverse 2

Keeping form while increasing power

Dragon Ball Xenoverse wasn't the most praised game of 2015, but despite its shallow mechanics, the fighting game was a hit with fans of the anime series. Players enjoyed the time-traveling tale that let them experience the events of the legendary series through the eyes of a custom character. With Xenoverse 2, players are tasked with once again heading back through the timeline and repairing the past in an adventure that should feel familiar to anyone who played the first game.

The combat of Dragon Ball Xenoverse 2 feels nearly identical to that of the first game. The decision not to innovate on the gameplay is curious, seeing as the fight mechanics were one of the most criticized aspects of the original, but that feeling of familiarity may appeal to those who loved the first title. In place of any sweeping changes to the combat, fans should anticipate additions outside of the fighting that make this sequel a more well-rounded experience.

[redacted] more big, over-the-top fights in the follow-up

In addition to a hub world that is roughly seven times the size of the original (as well as new hubs), Xenoverse 2 also features new characters and a more in-depth character-customization suite that includes more races than the last game. Players can also look forward to taking a roster of playable characters that features a mix of new and returning faces from Xenoverse 1 into a boss-battle mode that lets a team of six online players tackle a powerful enemy together.

In the story, players create a new Time Patroller to go back and battle adversaries from the series and films who want to alter the timeline and affect the future. Because you're creating a new character in the same universe, Bandai Namco says you can import your save from Xenoverse 1 and encounter the character you created in that game.

If you liked what you played in Dragon Ball Xenoverse, there's little evidence to suggest that you should avoid Xenoverse 2. Conversely, those who found the action shallow also have no evidence pointing to improvements.

» Brian Shea

[redacted]
PlayStation 4
Xbox One • PC

Style
1 or 2-Player Fighting
(6-Player Online)

[redacted]
Bandai Namco Entertainment

Developer
Dimps

[redacted]
October 25

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Student work by: John Regules & George Stoill

NBA 2K17

Become the next dynamic duo

Platforms
PlayStation 4
Xbox One • PC

Style
1 to 4-Player Sports
(10-Player Online)

Publisher
2K Sports

Developer
Visual Concepts

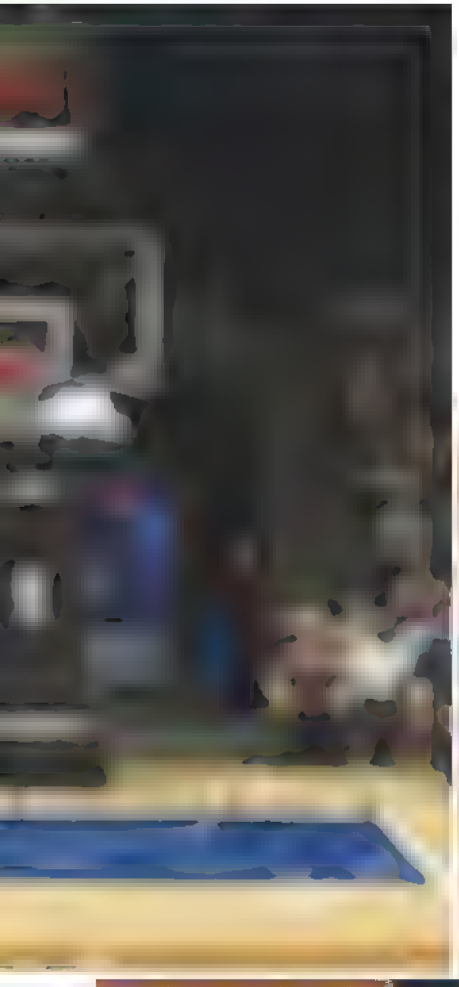
Release
September 20

With the next NBA Live scheduled to release some time in 2017, basketball fans only have one option if they want to hit the hardwood at season tip-off. Thankfully, the NBA 2K series is one of the most consistent performers in the sports genre. For NBA 2K17, developer Visual Concepts is making refinements across the board, competing with itself to keep its championship form.

On the court, gameplay director Mike Wang says they continue to strive for two goals: making the game look more like real basketball, and trying to put more control into players' hands. This vision touches most elements of the gameplay this year, including a reworked stealing system that better rewards timing, a new shooting meter, rebounding animations that add more physicality to working the boards, and a more realistic fatigue system that doesn't let players sprint full bore up and down the court without getting winded. The A.I. has new tools at its disposal as well, with sharpshooters who actively hunt for good three-point opportunities. Speaking of shooting, a new jump shot creator allows you to mix and match shooting styles from the hundreds of animations to give your MyPlayer the perfect stroke.

After last year's polarizing Spike Lee experiment, Visual Concepts is taking back the reins of its popular MyCareer mode. This year you take control of another coveted recruit right before national signing day. After picking your college of choice from 10 options, you play through a selection of games to solidify your NBA draft position. Once an NBA team crowns you its next rising star, the story centers on your customizable player and fictitious teammate Justice Young (played by *Creed* star Michael B. Jordan). Together, you strike out to follow in the footsteps of dynamic duos like Michael Jordan and Scottie Pippen or Shaquille O'Neal and Kobe Bryant. As you develop chemistry, you eventually unlock the ability to control Young on the court for a devastating two-man game. Other changes to MyCareer include using your MyCourt in cutscenes and more interactions with your teammates and coaches in the locker room and on the court.

While many sports games leave their franchise modes in disrepair, NBA 2K is never shy about innovating. This year features several dynamic additions in both the MyGM and MyLeague modes. The new league expansion for MyGM allows you to extend the Association with six brand-new teams, and the game automatically makes all the necessary changes to scheduling, drafting, etc. Purists can skip this feature altogether, but if you like the idea of resurrecting the Sonics or adding new cities to the league you can add teams incrementally or start with the expanded league from the beginning. Users have complete control over the new team names and logos, but those who don't want to spend hours in the creation engine can download user-created packages or several pre-made options from 2K. Other exciting changes aimed at hardcore franchise fans include being able to remodel existing arenas, offseason trades, protected draft picks,



and advanced rotations that let you control who is on the court for every minute of a game.

Online franchise fans have some interesting changes in store as well with MyLeague. The biggest change is how it handles team building. Instead of emulating the contracts of the real NBA, 2K has designed player movement around the fantasy concept of "keepers." Each player has a number of keeper years attached to him. When a season wraps, users get to keep an admin-designated number of players who still have keeper years. The rest of the players join the draft pool along with rookies. Player progression and regression factor into the equation, creating some interesting fantasy style dynasty scenarios. Do you grab a proven player with your top pick, or inject some needed youth into your roster?

New NBA 2K17 features extend far beyond its franchise modes and MyCareer, with the return of playoff mode, a new leveling system in 2K Pro-Am, and guest broadcasters who join regulars Kevin Harlan and Greg Anthony. We'll know if it all comes together as a comprehensive package come late September. » **Matt Bertz**

Michael B. Jordan (Creed) stars as teammate Justice Young in MyCareer. Together you can form the next great dynamic duo in the tradition of Shaq and Kobe.

The fidelity of control while defending one-on-one leads improved in NBA 2K17.

reviews

gameinformer
GAME OF THE MONTH

88 Quadrilateral Cowboy

Are you a master hacker? Time to prove it. In Blendo Games' latest quirky title, you play a robber who uses her trusty laptop and a host of gadgets to break into virtual worlds, overcome tricky puzzles, and steal valuable treasures. Combining engaging puzzle-based gameplay with surprisingly heartfelt storytelling, Quadrilateral Cowboy is a thrilling caper you don't want to miss.

THE SCORING SYSTEM

10	Outstanding. A truly elite title that is nearly perfect in every way. This score is given out rarely and indicates a game that cannot be missed.
9	Superb. Just shy of gaming nirvana, this score is a high recommendation because the game reviewed is head-and-shoulders above its competition.
8	Very Good. Innovative, but perhaps not the right choice for everyone. This score indicates that there are many good things to be had, but arguably so.
7	Average. The game's features may work, but are nothing that even casual players haven't seen before. A decent game from beginning to end.
6	Limited Appeal. Although there may be fans of games receiving this score, many will be left yearning for a more rewarding game experience.
5	Flawed. It may be obvious that the game has lots of potential, but its most engaging features could be undeniably flawed or not integrated into the experience.
4	Bad. While some things work as planned, the majority of this title either malfunctions or it is so dull that the game falls short as a whole.
3	Painful. If there is anything that's redeeming in a game of this caliber, it's buried beneath agonizing gameplay and uneven execution in its features or theme.
2	Broken. Basically unplayable. This game is so insufficient in execution that any value would be derived in extremely small quantities, if at all.
1	Your "Busy Worker" Halloween costume.

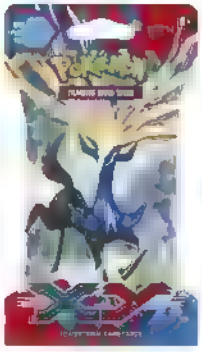
AWARDS

gameinformer PLATINUM	Awarded to games that score between 9.75 and 10
gameinformer GOLD	Awarded to games that score between 9 and 9.5
gameinformer SILVER	Awarded to games that score between 8.5 and 8.75
gameinformer GAME OF THE MONTH	The award for the most outstanding game in the issue

For more information on the age classification ratings in our reviews, head to gameinformer.com/ratings

THE HOTTEST STUFF
FROM THE **POWER UP REWARDS** CATALOG

Life-size Alien Facehugger & Egg



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Madden NFL 17

Perfect shouldn't be the enemy of good

8.5

PS4 • Xbox One
PS3 • 360

» **Concept**
Last year the air attack was addressed, and this time it's the ground game – mainly in the trenches

» **Graphics**
The player faces and uniform details (including new equipment) have taken a step up this year

» **Sound**
The new commentary is a revelation compared to years past due to its fluidity, sheer amount of content, and better contextual awareness. I also noticed a lot of little touches on the field such as grunts and equipment sounds

» **Playability**
Optional new visual indicators in the running game and auto-dekes are available for newcomers

» **Entertainment**
The experience isn't perfect on or off the field, but it still has plenty to like

» **Replay Value**
Moderately high

game informer SILVER

Style 1 to 4-Player Sports (4-Player Online) **Publisher** EA Sports **Developer** EA Tiburon **Release** August 23 **Rating** E

In Madden 17, a specific line stands out from the excellent new commentary team of Charles Davis and Brandon Gaudin. Davis, the ex-player providing the color commentary, talks about how coaches are always looking for that "perfect game." The perfect game doesn't exist in the NFL or in any given rendition of Madden. Even so, Madden 17 has a lot to enjoy. As they do every year, developers EA Tiburon concentrate on a set of new features, fixes, and points of emphasis to varying degrees of success. Not all the bases are covered, but this is still a team win that Madden gamers can appreciate on some level.

If last year's gameplay was all about the air attack, this year is about what happens on the ground. Instead of just picking your hole and turbo-ing through it, the revamped blocking schemes give players more to consider. Even though the holes are a little bigger, I wouldn't say running is easier. In fact, an in-your-face danger surrounds the defensive players as they crash in to disrupt the play or hold off an offensive lineman with one arm and come sliding down the line to gobble you up in the backfield with the other. The interplay between the offensive and defensive lines at the line of scrimmage is dynamic, exemplifying football's human chess match.

As fluid as some of the line play is (I saw an offensive lineman shuffle down the line of scrimmage, make a block, and then slide off and make a second block further down the line), you still see awkward steps by isolated players. Lead blockers occasionally prioritize the wrong target, players slide into catches or blocks (something I thought was solved last year), and others take baffling steps in the wrong direction.

Despite this emphasis on the ground, the air game has not been ignored. The new defensive zones make you double check a receiver is truly open before you throw the ball. It's a necessary addition that doesn't throw off the balance. Even when you're on defense, knowing which zones to call takes getting used to, although the new run/pass counters playcalling option – where you call defensive plays to address specific areas on the field – are a nice option when someone keeps beating you over the middle, for instance.

The latter is a nod to accessibility (itself a dirty word to the hardcore players out there) that I am happy to reap the benefits of. Similarly, the expanded sim options, like the Play the Moment feature that highlights only the key moments in a game for you to play, shows that it's possible to enjoy some of Madden's new features that I wasn't explicitly asking for.

This sentiment applies to the Connected Franchise mode as a whole. I have a running list of things I'd like to see in the mode that aren't in Madden 17 (better free agency, coordinators, more salary options, etc.), but I can't throw the baby out with the bathwater. Being able to take the risk of rushing players back from injury and the way injuries can affect your management of the new practice squad is satisfying, as are players regressing because of injury and highlighting which players develop faster than others. These features, as well as formation subs (in franchise mode) and the streamlined weekly game-planning, are relatively small potatoes compared to the overhaul in scouting, ownership, and other GM functions that Connected Franchise mode needs, but they are useful.

Madden 17's various online modes like Ultimate Team stay largely the same, but at least features that were added post-launch to Madden 16, such as ranked salary cap matches and playing against friends in Draft Champions, remain. One Ultimate Team addition worth mentioning is Chemistry styles, which expands and makes prominent the boost styles from last year.

Gamers often use the term ".5" as a derisive tag for a title merely being a half step toward the series' next evolution. While I agree Madden 17 isn't a leap forward, the fact that it rides Madden 16's coattails while creating its own (thanks to the commentary system and some of the trench play) doesn't make it a bad title. If you asked me which I'd rather have – a new franchise mode or the improved line play that's now in the game, it's hard to ignore what I've actually experienced versus a hypothetical. The game is better because of it, and there's no going back. » Matthew Kato

No Man's Sky

The most beautiful side mission

Style 1-Player Action **Publisher** Hello Games **Developer** Hello Games **Release** August 9 **Rating** T

7.5

PS4 • PC

» **Concept**
Explore a vast and procedurally generated universe of planets and the nearly infinite space in between

» **Graphics**
Gorgeous visual tableaus await as you uncover landscapes and anomalies never seen by anyone else

» **Sound**
In keeping with the broader structure, a procedurally generated score vacillates between relaxed ambiance and sci-fi wonder

» **Playability**
This is a game about discovery. The mechanics, controls, and interaction options unfold gradually through experimentation

» **Entertainment**
An inviting universe to explore and exploit, but not much story or gameplay backs up the unparalleled scope of the world

» **Replay Value**
Moderate

In its finest moments, No Man's Sky is a sublime exploration of the infinitude of space, the beauty and variation of nature, and a quiet contemplation on loneliness. That ambitious vision is accomplished through one of the most sophisticated approaches to procedural generation I've ever seen, in which entire ecosystems spring up across any one of millions of potential planets. However, No Man's Sky rarely reaches beyond its vibrant world-building efforts to provide satisfying gameplay and story. Over dozens of hours of play, I couldn't escape the sensation that I was playing one impossibly immense side mission, and I kept waiting for the real game to start.

No Man's Sky opens on a mysterious planet – one that no other player has ever seen or visited. Your ship is broken, and it needs to be repaired. You mine resources and survey landscapes. You hold mechanical sentinels at bay, and unearth alien monoliths from beneath multicolored flora. You navigate through the atmosphere and into the great beyond of outer space, there to confront pirates and visit trade-oriented space stations. Beyond this unknown solar system, a galaxy of planets and moons await discovery. The scope of potential encounters is mind-boggling, and I found a great deal of joy in the aimless wandering.

Along the way, expect to hear the phrase "no free slots in suit inventory" more than anything else. Hello Games has made inventory management and expansion the centerpiece of its gameplay loop, and your willingness to repeatedly confront that often-tedious task tells you a lot about whether this outer-space epic is for you. Most money acquisition and resource farming is aimed at broadening your carrying capacity. That fixation on gathering and mining is enjoyable in the early hours, but the continued focus grows increasingly dull as the game wears on. Here is the collection mechanic popularized by games like Minecraft, but without the same opportunity for creative building that characterizes the second part of the equation. The only reward for diligence is better tools and more space to store your plunder, with little in the way of meaningful story or changes to gameplay to maintain excitement.

Combat with hostile forces, both on the ground and in outer space, is only one small part of the experience. Fighting functions adequately, but falls short of providing thrills since the shooting mechanics and weaponry are both limited. The rest of the game is composed of other minor tasks that hold equal weight in the progression loop, including scanning planet zoology, surviving extreme conditions, learning alien languages, and encountering alien sentient beings in brief and often enigmatic conversations. Whether you're tracking down that last elusive species on an undiscovered world or conversing with a fellow traveler that communicates through scent, the focus is always on strangeness and isolation. The game succeeds in communicating those feelings early on, but struggles to remain novel with each passing hour.

A minimal and optional story thread weaves through your nomadic, galactic-drifter lifestyle. The mystery of the Atlas beckons from increasingly distant stars, and provides good reason to see the narrative through to its completion, if only as a small carrot to prompt continued planetary exploration. Monolithic structures in deep space and alien anomalies are awe-inducing the first time you find them; I just wish these encounters maintained that inscrutable quality upon subsequent required visits. Instead, these repeated and similar sequences lose a little magic with each appearance.

An aimlessness and freedom pervades No Man's Sky; the sensation is clearly purposeful, but not always pleasant. Without more meaningful rewards or engaging moment-to-moment action, the mid- and endgame experiences teeter away from sci-fi splendor and into rote repetition. No Man's Sky is a universe rich in potential, steeped in classic science-fiction tropes. It's a game space begging for additional crafted content, and I hope Hello Games continues to add more over time. For many, this freeform experience may not meet the towering expectations that preceded its launch. Nonetheless, it's frequently an enthralling place to visit. Even after many hours of galactic pioneer work, I still find myself pausing from time to time, and looking out on a world of my own discovery, marveling at its alien grandeur.

» Matt Miller

This review pertains to the PS4 version of No Man's Sky. The game is also available on PC.

Deus Ex: Mankind Divided

A big heart with a mechanical soul

Style 1-Player Action **Publisher** Square Enix **Developer** Eidos Montreal **Release** August 23 **Rating** M

7

PS4 • Xbox One • PC

» Concept
A choice-driven adventure that puts the player in difficult circumstances, but struggles to make the story feel meaningful over the long haul

» Graphics
Many environments offer immense amounts of details, little touches, and key iconography to establish a beautiful and believable sci-fi vibe. Character animations also impress

» Sound
The soundtrack elicits a cyberpunk/sci-fi feeling. The extensive voice acting is hit or miss, sometimes suffering from how much characters say at any given time

» Playability
Stealth is king. The gunplay, while controlling well, suffers from shoddy A.I. and uninteresting scenario design

» Entertainment
A reflection of our world today, but it ends up a little too long winded and the narrative sometimes slows the experience to a crawl

» Replay Value
Moderately high

Breach Mode

In addition to the story campaign, Deus Ex comes equipped with a secondary mode called Breach. This first-person hacking game delivers fun puzzle-like stages that push the player to download data from stations quickly to achieve the highest score possible. Combat, stealth, and thorough environment navigation all come to play. Upon stage completion, the player earns packs of cards that contain weapons, upgrades, and other kinds of loot. Breach is an enjoyable (and lengthy) arcade experience that complements the main game well.

Deus Ex: Mankind Divided is futuristic science fiction, but the message it delivers stems from today's societal problems. Police shoot unarmed innocents, extremist groups unleash acts of terror, and communities are torn apart by segregation. The story explores these issues thoroughly and makes a clear statement about the threat posed by totalitarianism, but the delivery is often heavy-handed and overstated. In establishing its vision of an oppressed world, the player is treated like a hard drive for extensive downloads of backstory and lore – so much so that I had to make notes just to keep track of all of the shadow organizations, acronyms, and shady government officials. The game made me think about my world, which is clearly the intent, but I never felt a strong connection to the game or the role protagonist Adam Jensen plays within it. Eidos Montreal attempts to disguise hot-button issues as speculative fiction, but sacrifices an interesting story to hammer home its messaging.

Even Jensen is off his game, often appearing so gloomy he makes RoboCop seem like the life of the party. When we first meet Jensen, he's on assignment in Dubai, tracking an arms dealer through an unfinished skyscraper. This mission displays the promise of Deus Ex's gameplay, deftly mixing stealth with hacking and the occasional exchange of gunfire. This mission is paced nicely and delivers true excitement, culminating in the surprise assault by a new terrorist cell. It's a hell of an introductory sequence, but the game never finds that pulse again, and instead becomes formulaic.

Once the action starts in earnest, the missions are surprisingly dull, mostly having the player navigate a sea of enemies to track down people to communicate with or an object of desire. I know this may sound like Deus Ex at its core, but my back was hardly ever against a wall, and I wasn't compelled to search high and low for a more efficient path. I rarely ran into a need to switch play styles (as I did in Deus Ex: Human Revolution, the precursor game), as most zones are only lightly peppered with guards or threats.

Outside of the critical-path missions, the world opens up and allows players to sink their teeth into what Deus Ex is known for: player freedom. None of the hub worlds are huge, but they are all truly open, with numerous side missions to tackle and secrets hidden well off of the beaten path. The world itself is beautifully realized, visually giving us a look at the different wealth classes, and the impact government has had on their states of living. Just walking the streets can be an intense experience, given how heavily policed some areas are.

Eidos Montreal also does a great job of leaving navigation up to player discovery. Figuring out how to reach points of interest is left entirely up to you, and it's glorious. Thorough exploration is often required, and rewarded with helpful shortcuts, loot galore, interesting people to meet, and additional side quests. Good fun can come from these diversions. I got a huge kick out of tracking down a magician using his powers to create a cult, and looting random people's homes is also worthwhile.

The one interesting wrinkle in Jensen's life is the discovery of concealed mods in his body. He doesn't know who put them there or what might happen when he uses them. This revelation smacks of a bad omen and future plotline, but ends up being little more than a gameplay gimmick, providing a new set of abilities for players to explore. As fun as these powers can be – ranging from tesla blasts to bursts of super speed – nothing is as enjoyable or reliable as the basic stealth techniques, like hiding behind boxes and sneaking up behind opponents.

The A.I. foes behave realistically when they don't know you are around; they look through windows, turn in different directions while walking, and require careful studying just as they patrol hallways. Should they discover your location, there's little need to panic, as they are often as dumb as bricks. They can be exploited easily – so much so that firefights often end with piles of bodies blocking a doorway.

Although the RPG systems offer a variety of upgrades, I only really needed to focus on a few stealth-based paths to take full advantage of the stealth play, and many of those systems return from the first game. A good number of the new upgrades improve Jensen's proficiency from afar, meaning you don't just have to rely on firearms. These additions help flesh Jensen out as a capable one-man army, but don't necessarily change how you approach any encounter.

Although Eidos Montreal apologized for the terrible boss battles in Deus Ex: Human Revolution, this sequel delivers a battle that is just as infuriating. I ended up cheesing the sequence by hiding in a vent, and picking away at his health.

I like seeing games tackle difficult subject matter, but that message, while occasionally coming through loud and clear, is ultimately lost in this dull and slow-moving story. Mankind Divided starts off with a bang, but quickly becomes a muddled mess of politics and techno-babble. • Andrew Reiner

Master Of Orion

Streamlining the stars

Style 1-Player Strategy (6-Player Online) **Publisher** Wargaming/WG Labs **Developer** NGG Studios **Release** August 25 **Rating** E10+

8.25

PC

» **Concept**
Conquer space with military might, technological superiority, or diplomatic deception

» **Graphics**
This may be the visual high point for 4X space titles. Everything looks exquisite, highlighted by planetary colonization scenes and raucous space battles

» **Sound**
Advisors for each race and narration bring out the flavor with a cool cast of voice actors, and the music keeps things suitably relaxed or intense as the situations change

» **Playability**
Incredibly welcoming, the experience is streamlined to accommodate those new to the strategy archetype, but there's still a lot to take in

» **Entertainment**
A polished renewal of the classic franchise that's more suited for genre newcomers than for fans looking for a highly complex strategy game

» **Replay Value**
High

More than 20 years ago, Alan Emrich coined the term "4X" (Explore, Expand, Exploit, and Exterminate) in a preview for *Computer Gaming World*. The game being described was Master of Orion, and the strategy genre owes much to the classic title; it is essentially the grandfather of all space 4X that came after, and living up to that nostalgia and innovation is a daunting task. This revival takes aspects of Master of Orion and Master of Orion 2 and streamlines the experience to make it much more accessible. Giving everything a modern coat of polish has resulted in an enjoyable 4X experience, even if it's not quite as complex or deep as hardcore genre fans may desire.

Before getting into the action, you pick a race to complement your playstyle. I gravitated to the xenophobic Silicoids, an outcast race that can handle intense environments and eats rocks, so they benefit from zero food consumption. The hive-like Klackon stepped into my second favorite seat, but for those who really like to min-max their experience, you can create a custom race with traits tailored to your specific needs. The races aren't lacking in flavor or personality, and it's fun to branch out of your comfort zone.

Gameplay is welcoming (especially within a genre known for intimidating newcomers), with a handy advisor available to let you know what you're missing and offer suggestions. More experienced players can turn the advisor off, but it's a comprehensive and useful way to learn the ins and outs of galactic conquest. The turn process also ensures you've handled active units, production concerns, and technology before passing, so you always know exactly what's going on. Espionage and spying are awesome, and implemented in an easy-to-use fashion anyone can get into – even players that may shy away from these sorts of shenanigans in other titles.

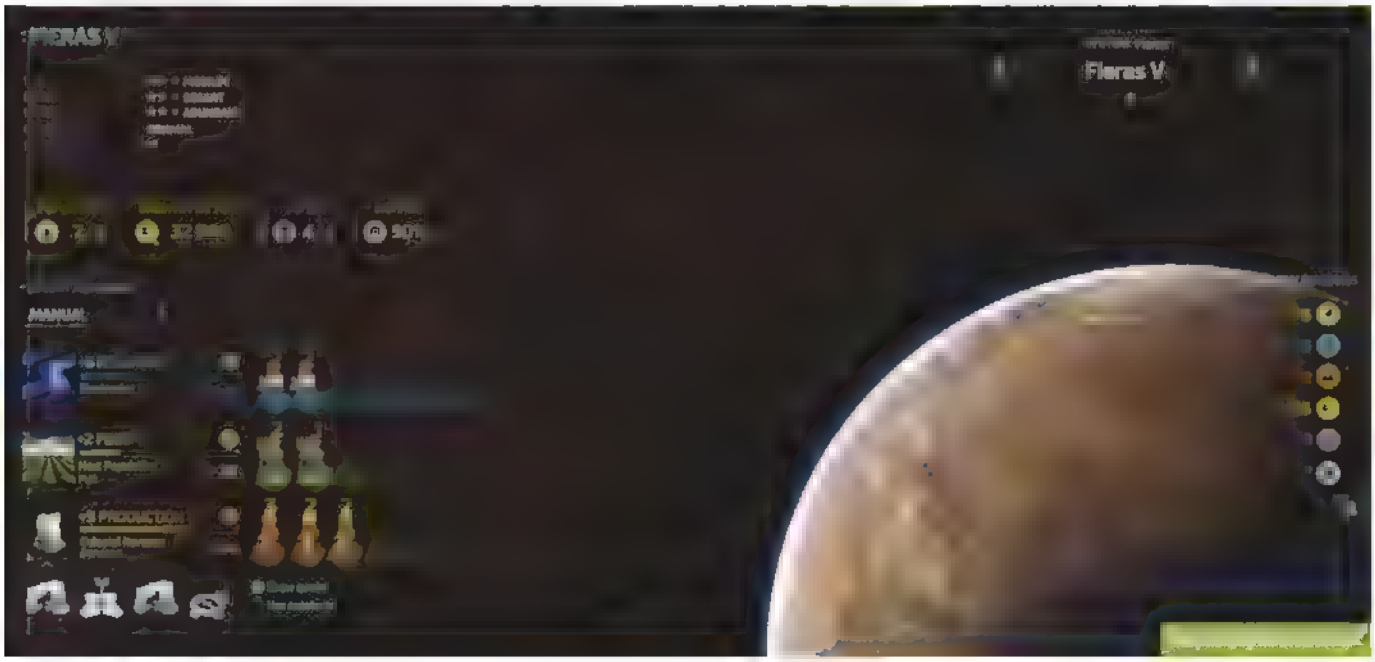
As you explore, you uncover new planets, make friends and enemies, and develop your colonized worlds with all kinds of defenses and upgrades. Your decisions here tie into your overarching strategy, whether you want to be a warmonger, technocrat, diplomat, expansionist, or some combination of everything. The passage of time is dotted with other interesting world events, which are reported on with little news-broadcast cutscenes. GNN News offers insight when a strange new creature appears in space, when large-scale disasters happen, and when the balance of power shifts. World events and GNN help shake up the traditional turn structure and add variance and flavor to the strategy formula.

One significant diversion from the franchise roots is the combat process. Turn-based battles are a thing of the past, giving way to real-time-with-pause fights, should you wish to take control of your units directly (auto-resolve is still the easiest way to handle ship battles). While I'm sure many purists will scoff at the lack of a turn-based option, the faster pace of real time worked for me. As much as I appreciate turn-based battles, I would rather get a few more games in with the time saved by the more modern approach.

Master of Orion's simplified nature works well in some areas, but it causes the experience to lose life in others. Technology trees are so streamlined that sometimes you forget you're playing a unique race halfway through a game; things feel like they always end up in the same place. "Star lanes" keep your fleets and starships on tracks, effectively corralling the action and limiting mobility, forming disappointing bottlenecks.

Master of Orion is an incredibly polished iteration and a worthwhile return to the beloved franchise, but it's entering a galaxy full of fierce competition as the space 4X genre has seen a big bang of resurgence over the last few years. Master of Orion boasts a lot to love for new players, and it's one of the best entry-level 4X games out there, but veterans may find themselves searching the stars for more complexity.

» Daniel Tack



Quadrilateral Cowboy

An enthralling hacking-based adventure

9.5

gamesformer GOLD gamesformer GAME OF THE MONTH

Style 1-Player Puzzle Publisher Blendo Games
Developer Blendo Games Release July 25 Rating NR

PC

» **Concept**
Complete a series of heists using your hacking skills and an arsenal of goofy gadgets

» **Graphics**
Blendo Games' unique art style infuses every level with charm

» **Sound**
A nice, low-key soundtrack bolsters an already great sound design

» **Playability**
The control scheme takes a few minutes to get used to, but adjusting to the rhythm is easy

» **Entertainment**
As fiendishly clever as it is stylish, Quadrilateral Cowboy is one of the best puzzle adventure games in years

» **Replay Value**
High

It's the dead of night. You clamber up through a hatch to see the skyscraper where the confidential contract you need to photograph is hidden. Using your portable computer, referred to as your "deck," you hack open doors and grates to amble on toward your target, disabling security systems along the way. When you finally reach the room, you snap some shots of the contract and then leave just as quietly as you came, vanishing without anyone ever knowing you were there. The perfect crime.

Like most good puzzlers, Quadrilateral Cowboy is about the agony of grasping at epiphany as well as the deep sense of satisfaction you earn when finally overcoming whatever conundrum is blocking your path. However, Quadrilateral Cowboy excels because of its structure and the sheer joy of the gizmos it gives you to solve its puzzles.

The game consists of a series of heists carried out in a virtual world. You begin with only your deck, which lets you input commands and run various programs. This starts out simple enough, allowing you to manipulate certain objects in the environment to progress through each level. For example, if a locked door blocks your path, you can input "door1.open" in the deck's command line to unlock it.

As Quadrilatera. Cowboy goes on, it introduces new elements that make things trickier. That next door you want to unlock? It probably has a timer attached to it that causes an alarm to ring if it's open longer than three seconds, which dings your performance rating or kills you outright in later levels. To bypass this obstacle, you have to add a qualifier to your command: door1.open (3), with the number in parenthesis representing how many seconds the door stays open. Soon you have to string together commands like this in order to quickly bypass cameras and locked doors to reach your target.

And that's only the opening levels, when it's just you and your deck. To say much about the other gadgets Quadrilateral Cowboy throws into the mix would spoil a lot of its charming aesthetic, an alluring oddball combination of retro espionage and cyberpunk. You see mobile camera robots, turrets hidden in suitcases, and an entire arsenal of cool devices that wouldn't be out of place in a '70s spy thriller. Nearly all of them can be controlled by your deck and are essential to completing heists.

Most heists play out basically the same way. You're given a gadget you earn with money from the last set of missions and it becomes the key tool for getting through the next three missions, which collectively serve as the heist. The first mission teaches you the basics of the tool, the next expects you to use it in combination with whatever else you have in your belt, and the last mission forces you into situations where you must carefully consider how to use that device to get where you need to go. This might mean navigating a tiny robot through a ventilation shaft or positioning your suitcase turret in an unexpected location so you can hit a necessary button with a bullet.

One of the most surprising things about the game is how accessible it is despite its emphasis on hands-on, command line hacking. The controls take a few tries to get used to, but once you're into the swing of things, pulling off challenging feats is surprisingly simple, like guiding a miniature robot around a room or stringing together a bunch of actions to occur within a matter of seconds. If that is too much of a hassle and you want to just experience the story, a "tourist mode" turns off all security alarms and unlocks doors, making failure impossible.

Heists are structured so that you're just starting to grow tired of a gadget before moving on to a series of missions that are centered on a new gizmo for you to play with. This flow creates an enjoyable experience that's difficult to stop playing. I even revisited some of the bite-sized missions to beat my previous times.

Between missions, you're free to explore the base of operations you and your fellow thieves use as well as other areas outside of the heist zones. The narrative is not communicated through dialogue or cutscenes, but instead through action-heavy setpieces as well as environmental storytelling. One of my favorite parts involves how the trio of robbers carpools to work, so you explore each character's home when you go to pick them up in the early hours of the morning. We might not get a long soliloquy or have a drawn-out conversation with Greaser (one of your companions), but the gadgets-in-progress on her workbench as well as the trophies on her wall tell us more than enough about her personality. Quadrilateral Cowboy's storytelling is slightly surreal, but not to the point of being infuriatingly enigmatic. Instead, it's one of the more enticing qualities.

Quadrilateral Cowboy is a strange, fantastic journey that charms and tests you in equal measure. This is easily my favorite puzzle game since Portal 2. I expect to come back to it many times over the next few months despite having completed it, searching the environments for nuggets of story hidden away in the corners of each level and striving to become the best thief this side of cyberspace. » Javy Gwaltney

Starbound

A satisfying space sandbox

gamesfarmer SILVER

Style 1-Player Action/Simulation (Multiplayer Online) **Publisher** Chucklefish Games
Developer Chucklefish Games **Release** July 22 **Rating** NR

8.5

PC • Mac

» **Concept**
Build a ship, assemble a crew, craft, and mine while exploring the universe

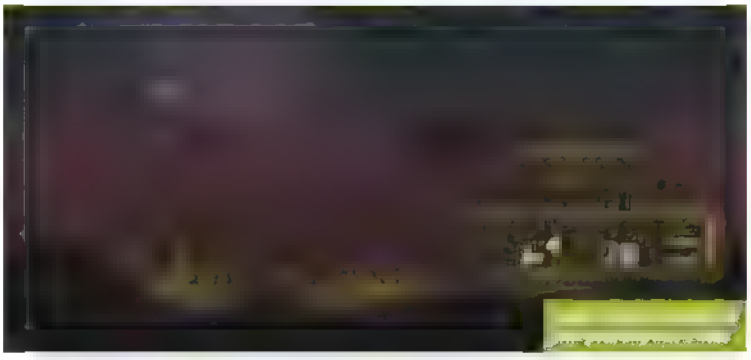
» **Graphics**
The retro style doesn't feel out of place or tacked on here. It is a good fit for the huge world

» **Sound**
While the sound effects from aliens and ore chunks are nothing special, the excellent soundtrack has soothing, serene, and inspiring tunes

» **Playability**
The early hours are the most frustrating as you gain the ability to travel to new worlds from your broken-down husk of a ship, but once things take off, you unlock new options and technology at a brisk pace

» **Entertainment**
If you're a fan of games like Minecraft and Terraria, Starbound is not to be missed. It can keep you enchanted for hours, whether you're playing solo or on a server with friends

» **Replay Value**
High



Starbound is a survival/exploration experience that was in some form of early access for years, but now has finally launched into orbit with an official release. Players begin in deep space, surrounded by unfamiliar planets and with a malfunctioning ship at their disposal. From there, the universe opens up slowly, revealing new activities and items that help ensure your survival and prosperity, drawing you in to a vast universe to discover alone or with friends.

Adventurers blaze trails in the stars, picking up the best weapons and armor, hewing and shooting their way through harsh alien planets and collecting treasure from hidden dungeons. Survivors crawl victoriously from deep digs out to the surface, furtively stuffing rapidly decaying food in their mouths to stave off hunger while hastily wrapping bandages on wounds. Ambitious farmers and builders create vast crop and supply networks fueled by ever-advancing technology and ship upgrades. If you just want to bash some blocks or swing a sword at alien monsters without getting too much into any of the systems at play, you can do that, too.

Since Starbound is a pure sandbox with tons of moving pieces, from obscure food recipes to bizarre building bits like bones or flesh stalks, a lot of gameplay comes down to how you like to play, be it building, crafting, hoarding, upgrading, farming, exploring, or dungeon-diving. While you gravitate toward your preferred activities, you must branch into other tasks in some fashion; even if you're not a builder you still need to cobble together a functional base.

Starbound offers literally quadrillions of procedurally generated planets to explore. The many biomes and worlds are smattered with a rewarding and consistent loop of mini-bosses, dungeons, dangers, and treasure, so you constantly upgrade your gear and technology. This includes dashing and jumping augmentations that make traversal easier, and permanently enhancing your matter manipulator to burn through blocks with greater efficiency. The constant churn of upgrading keeps interest high in a world where digging into planet after planet could risk feeling like a repetitive slog.

I like taking on Starbound in an action-oriented style, targeting loot-laden chests and focusing on upgrading my weaponry to plow through dungeons and take on harder enemies, amassing pixels (currency) from my conquests to buy food and other goods I don't feel like harvesting. Some of my friends prefer building up massive bases on worlds that support crops while crafting and teching up instead of taking big risks underground. Starbound, like many games before it, is best experienced with friends on a dedicated server where everyone can split off or play together in groups, eventually coming back home to contribute to a communal pot. Getting into intergalactic chaos with a couple of friends is a lot more fun than taking on a horde of angry bird-people alone.

Starbound is a satisfying space sandbox that rarely disappoints, with occasional minor bugs or mandatory missions offering minor quibbles with unbridled, endless exploration. This ambitious indie project has something for everyone buried within its retrograde graphical framework. » Daniel Tack

Mod The Planet

While the core game contains enough to keep even the most intrepid of space adventurers occupied for hundreds of hours, a hearty selection of mods can be used to tailor the experience to more exacting specifications. From simple tweaks like enhanced storage space or removing hunger to sprawling mods that add monsters, quests, biomes, resources, and weapons, these additions can make the Starbound universe just right for you and the rest of your spacey friends.

The King Of Fighters XIV

A small jump forward, an evasive roll back

2.25

Style 1 or 2-Player Fighting (2-Player Online) **Publisher** Atlus USA **Developer** SNK **Release** August 23 **Rating** T

PS4

» Concept
Take The King of Fighters XIII's gorgeous characters and fighting system and slather them onto 3D polygons

» Graphics
Fluid character animations meet character models from the fake games you see on TV shows

» Sound
Decent stage themes, but the awful main menu music will be the one stuck in your head

» Playability
Characters have a wide breadth of movement and combo options if you can wrap your head around them all

» Entertainment
Lots of characters and online modes to tinker with, but the single-player portion feels limited

» Replay Value
High

As other fighting game series expand the genre's territory with new single-player modes and art styles, The King of Fighters series digs its trench deeper, appealing to the interests of the hardcore fighting game fan. The King of Fighters XIV doesn't deviate from that, and while the core three-on-three fighting allows expressive and tense matches, it doesn't give new players a good enough reason to jump in.

The King of Fighters XIV falls somewhere between the no-nonsense technicality of Virtua Fighter and off-the-wall bombast of Capcom's Versus series. If you understand the basics of fighting games, you can combo just by pressing buttons and moving the stick around, but the most riveting matches happen when the technical and wacky come together in intricate combos which string together basic, special, and outlandish super moves.

This series has always been about intricacy. You only have four attack buttons to worry about, but many characters have moves requiring directional and button inputs, as well as several special and super moves. The King of Fighters XIV's tutorial introduces you to all the maneuvers at your disposal, but it's more of an encyclopedia than a guide to playing well. The various jumps, evasive rolls, special moves, and supers allow for a diverse array of approach angles and defensive options, but might prove daunting to learn for even long-time fighting vets.

On top of this, Max mode changes up some of the fundamentals of the series. Using up one bar of super meter, you activate the ability to use powerful EX versions of moves freely and cancel moves mid-animation to extend combos for a short time. It's a novel way to approach combo creation, since you have to go all-in on a combo when you see the opportunity for one, but it adds a timing pressure that further complicates the fighting system.

Every fighter has its share of combos to learn, but here the moves require more finesse and precision to pull off than most, which makes combos more difficult. Since consecutive hits don't offer as diminished a return as in other fighters, combos are more essential to winning, too. The Rush combo offers new players the ability to string combos together by just mashing the light punch button. These combos don't deal as much damage as bespoke ones, but it's an invaluable addition for players whose combo knowledge disappears in real fights. Experienced players won't use these much – think of them as training wheels.

Unfortunately, the game doesn't offer a step between mashing out Rush combos and learning the real deal. It's fun to mess around with friends and see cool attacks happen, but The King of Fighters XIV isn't flashy or rewarding enough on that level to make that enough. It rewards refined play, but doesn't guide players toward it.

It doesn't help that the jump to 3D models from 2D sprites is a step back aesthetically. Character models look much better in motion than in stills, but they're a downgrade from XIII's beautiful renditions of Terry Bogard, Joe Higashi, or King.

The game compensates for its bland look with an impressive 50-character roster, of which 18 are new. The character diversity is impressive, and makes it so that everyone can find a character they like. But it also makes the learning curve steeper, since new players have to learn more character matchups.

Most of your learning happens by diving into online matches. The online is far more playable than The King of Fighter XIII's (I found more than my fair share of solid matches), but I still encountered slow-motion matches and disconnects, even when my opponent had a four-bar connection.

In terms of single-player offerings, The King of Fighters offers the standard arcade mode, a time trial, a survival, and trial modes. I spent most of my time in trial mode, since the combos are a fun challenge and a decent way to get to know each character better. The other modes let you test out combos in live situations, but fighting computer-controlled opponents is nowhere near as fun as fighting real people.

The King of Fighters XIV's combo system is loose and expressive, and the character variety makes it easy to keep playing for hours. The learning curve is still a bit too steep for new players, but those who make the effort to climb it will find a fun, if unadventurous, fighter.

» Suriel Vazquez

Metroid Prime: Federation Force

At the intersection of fun and frustration

Style 1 to 6-Player Shooter (6-Player Online) **Publisher** Nintendo **Developer** Next Level Games **Release** August 19 **Rating** T

The announcement of Metroid Prime: Federation Force garnered significant backlash from fans of the series. With nary a mention of the oft-requested 2D Metroid game, many saw Federation Force – a four-player cooperative first-person shooter for the 3DS – as a slap in the face and refused to accept it as a true Metroid title. While those complaints are justified, Next Level Games overcame the scrutiny to release a spin-off title that is enjoyable most of the time.

In the latest Metroid Prime game, you're cast as a new recruit to the Federation Force, an elite intergalactic group devoted to ridding the galaxy of impending threats. The campaign consists of traveling between three unique planets and completing bite-sized missions that tie into the Metroid Prime universe. The 22 missions range from clearing out a base of space pirates to progressing through a level full of sphere-based puzzles. Unlike most Metroid games, there is little emphasis on exploration or upgrades, setting Federation Force apart as a definite spin-off.

Each mission provides a different challenge, but Federation Force is at its best when you're blasting through a room full of baddies. I've always had an aversion to shooters using the 3DS controls, but Federation Force employs a strong lock-on system combined with motion controls to pick exactly what part of the target you want to shoot. Even at great distances I could lock onto enemies then target their weak points by tilting the 3DS system.

The only times the lock-on system failed me were rare occurrences when several enemies and points-of-interest were on-screen at the same time and the system had a hard time deciding which one I was trying to target. An alternate control configuration exists that lets you use the C-Stick of the New 3DS models for aiming instead of the motion controls, but it's much less precise.

Though the missions are diverse and the mechanics are sound, the experience is hindered by the lack of checkpoints. That means if all players die or the objective fails, you must play it again from the start. In many missions this isn't a problem, but some contain longer boss fights with subsequent battles, and the lack of a save point is enraging. In a later mission, I had little problem dispatching the multi-stage boss, but the difficult area following that boss battle caused me to fail out repeatedly. Each time I failed, I had to face that long boss battle before getting to the difficult part. Another mission required that I ride a slow-moving cart through an enemy-filled stage before facing an all-out assault that destroyed the precious cargo on the cart and forced me to restart the level.

When you combine the lack of a checkpoint system with the sheer challenge of the missions, the game is not ideal for solo players. Federation Force is an experience best played with friends, but the game sometimes gets in the way of letting that happen. To play with another person, each player must be on the level that you want to play on their individual save files. This means if you're stuck on mission 20 and want your friend who just got the game to help you out, you need to wait for them to catch up before they can help you progress.

When I wanted to power through a mission by myself, I needed to use the equipment systems to my advantage. Before each mission, you can equip modifiers and auxiliary weapons to your mech's slots. The mods range from armor plating and increased missile payloads to even one that auto-revives you upon death. The special ammo uses an inventory system to let you bring things like missiles, repair kits, decoys, and elemental weapons into the mission. You can also activate autonomous combat drones to help you, which I found necessary on harder missions. While this system doesn't quite deliver the variance of the arsenal of a standard Metroid title, I enjoyed reconfiguring my mech each mission to try and optimize it for the situation at hand.

Outside of the main campaign players can tackle Blast Ball, a three-on-three soccer minigame with the objective of using your blasters to push a giant ball into your opponents' goal. This mode puts the shooting mechanics to good use, and while you won't find much depth, it's fun to step away from the main game to play some quick rounds. It can even be played locally with friends who don't have their own copy of the game using Download Play.

If you're interested in Federation Force, I recommend verifying that someone you know is also planning on buying it. It's not impossible to beat by yourself, but it's more fun to play alongside someone else – especially when you can do so locally.

Metroid Prime: Federation Force features strong shooting mechanics, diverse missions, and a high level of challenge, but the frustrating matchmaking infrastructure and lack of checkpoints prevent it from truly achieving the greatness of its namesake.

» Brian Shea

7

3DS

» Concept
Step into the shoes of a new member of the Federation Force as you blast your way through a series of first-person missions set in the Metroid Prime universe

» Graphics
The character proportions give it a cartoony feel, but the visuals are crisp for a 3DS game and the framerate is consistent even with a lot happening

» Sound
The music doesn't stand out, but the satisfying sound of collecting a secret mod or blasting an enemy away made me keep the volume up

» Playability
Federation Force is challenging and the lack of checkpoints detract greatly from the experience, but the shooter mechanics are some of the best of their kind on the 3DS

» Entertainment
Though riddled with frustrating sequences, the campaign is fun to play through solo or with friends, and Blast Ball is a fun distraction

» Replay Value
Moderate

Amiibo Support

Using any Amiibo with Metroid Prime: Federation Force unlocks a special skeleton paintjob for your mech, but you're going to want to use one of the Samus Amiibos for your playthrough. Scanning the standard Samus figure unlocks a paintjob that mirrors the iconic bounty hunter's armor while boosting your missile inventory to 10 for each bundle you equip, while the Zero Suit Samus figure opens up a Zero Suit paintjob that boosts the Slow Beam auxiliary ammo to 5 rounds per bundle. I highly recommend using the paintjob from the standard Samus Amiibo if that's an option.

the score

8 | F1 2016

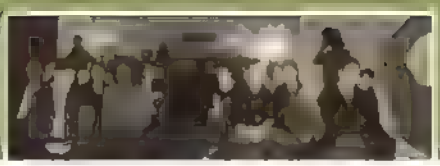
Platform PS4, Xbox One, PC **Release** August 19 **Rating** E

Having modes is only the first step; building them is another. Going from zero to 60 and beyond in a hurry, F1 2016 not only brings back its career mode, but builds it out in impressive fashion. – Matthew Kato

8 | Minecraft: Story Mode – Episode 7: Access Denied

Platform PS4, Xbox One, PS3, 360, PC, iOS
Release July 26 **Rating** E10+

Access Denied is a strong episode that tries new things and relies on familiar elements to mostly good results. I enjoyed going up against the massive threat of PAMA and fighting to save the world from his rule, and the action supports that thrilling premise. This penultimate episode does everything it needed to excite me for the final episode in this season of Minecraft: Story Mode. – Brian Shea



5 | This Is The Police

Platform PC **Release** August 2 **Rating** T

This is the Police lets you walk a tightrope as a shady police chief on his way out of office, but it's far from a thrill. One false step and you find yourself facing a long fall (and lost progress) that keeps you further away from the end of this too long interactive spreadsheet. – Jeff Cork

7.75 | Deus Ex Go

Platform iOS **Release** August 18 **Rating** E10

When I finished Deus Ex Go, I was mostly content with the four hours I had plugged into it. I occasionally felt clever at solving a tricky puzzle, and I liked the visual presentation. However, it didn't sink its hooks into me – Javy Gwaltney

7.75 | Bound

Platform PS4 **Release** August 16 **Rating** E10

Seeing Bound instantly begs the question, "What are you playing?" but its movement mechanics make it unsure if it wants to be an engaging platformer or a passive, relaxing experience. It lives somewhere between the two worlds, never fully embracing either but it sure looks pretty. – Kyle Hilliard

7 | Alone With You

Platform PS4, Vita **Release** August 23 **Rating** NR

I admired the different locations and existential tone, but longed for a more captivating storyline. Like the holographic cast it chronicles, this experience lacks a distinct personality, leaving it as a charming but forgettable adventure – Elise Favis

7 | Brutal

Platform PS4 **Release** August 9 **Rating** T

Brutal's attempts to capture the past often bleed into slavish devotion, hamstringing a would be great game with cheap deaths and tediousness. – Javy Gwaltney

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A Place Of Residing Evil

Looking back at Capcom's original survival horror game

by Ben Reeves

Tokuro Fujiwara didn't play video games; he didn't even know that Konami was a game developer when he walked into the studio to apply for a product planner job he'd heard about through a college recruiter. However, Fujiwara excelled at game development. After breaking into the industry at Konami, Fujiwara moved over to Capcom, where he created Ghosts 'n Goblins and Bionic Commando before working on other 8-bit classics such as Strider, DuckTales, and Mega Man 2.

Fujiwara's most significant contribution to the gaming industry, however, might be an often-overlooked RPG for Nintendo's first console that never officially released outside Japan. Entitled Sweet Home, Fujiwara's project sounds like a game bound for obscurity; it was an adaptation of a low-budget Japanese horror film that served as an early experiment in video game horror. In spite of all this, Sweet Home became a cult hit and went on to inspire the Resident Evil franchise as well as the entire survival horror genre.

Film Fright

At some point in the late '80s, Capcom began talking with Japanese film company Itami Productions about making a game based on the then-upcoming film *Sweet Home*. The gory horror flick centered on a small crew of documentarians who break into the abandoned country home of a famous artist named Ichirō Mamiya. According to legend, 30 years previously Ichirō hid several precious frescos somewhere inside his home, and the fictional film crew hope to uncover these lost treasures for a documentary. Unfortunately, a mysterious ghost traps the crew inside the late artist's house, kicking off a series of paranormal events ultimately leading to their demise.

Before the film's theatrical debut, Capcom sent Fujiwara to walk through the set and talk with the film's director. Fujiwara and his team used reference materials from this visit to create many of the objects and environments in the game. When it came to the script, however, Fujiwara took several liberties, often elaborating on story elements that were only hinted at in the film.

For example, at one point in the movie, the fictional documentarians stumble upon a small grave. The crew then discovers that the grave belonged to Ichirō's infant son, who had died tragically after accidentally falling into a furnace. Devastated by this event, Ichirō's wife kills herself and begins haunting their home.

This plot point isn't developed further in the film, but in the game, Fujiwara added a series of collectable diary entries that expand on the narrative. These diaries explain how Ichirō's wife was driven crazy after the death of her child, and how she proceeded to lure other young children to their deaths so her son would have playmates in the afterlife. Throwing with premature souls, Ichirō's house eventually becomes a hotspot of paranormal activity.

It was unprecedented in the late '80s for a video game to expand on a film's narrative in this way. Most games of the era were lucky if they could accurately communicate the main beats of the film they were adapting, let alone embellish the narrative. Fujiwara, on the other hand, knew games were capable of doing more than was expected of them, and this push to explore the limits of the gaming medium can be seen in every element of Sweet Home's design.

Scared 8-bitless

Since Fujiwara's game was based on a movie, developing its story was relatively easy. However, Fujiwara had few reference points when it came to designing Sweet Home's gameplay. A few early PC titles had played around with horror themes, such as Nostromo and 3D Monster Maze, but games rarely delivered the kind of oppressive atmosphere Fujiwara wanted. In 2003, Fujiwara told the Japanese gaming magazine *Continue* he wanted Sweet Home's gameplay to be an interesting mix of unconventional concepts and an attempt to do something the industry hadn't seen before.

Many of Sweet Home's gameplay concepts still sound fresh even by today's standards. Players control five different heroes as they explore Ichirō's mansion and participate in random turn-based RPG encounters. Unlike most RPGs, however, monsters didn't drop money or items. Instead, Fujiwara thought it would be more interesting if players collected important story items in the world and then used those items to open up new areas – a gameplay system that would later become a staple of the survival horror genre.

Players could also group their heroes into teams of up to three, but that meant one team was always short by at least one member. Characters also had special items that gave them unique abilities. For example, one character had a lighter that could burn away ropes blocking corridors and doorways, while another character had a first-aid pack that could neutralize status ailments. The difficulty ramped up significantly if party members started to die thanks to a permadeath system. However, Sweet Home remembered those who sacrificed themselves for the greater good and delivered one of five different endings based on players' actions throughout the game.

One of Sweet Home's most impressive features was successfully selling the horror experience on Nintendo's 8-bit console. As players explored the mansion, furniture would suddenly move to attack them, ghosts could be seen fluttering down the hall out of the corner of the screen, and distorted animal's sounds would be heard echoing though the mansion's blood-scrawled walls. Sweet Home's graphics seem crude by today's standards, but when players first got their hands on the game two-and-a-half decades ago, many of them were too scared to play in the dark. Fujiwara had accomplished his goal. No one had ever seen anything like Sweet Home before.

A Reign Of Terror

Sweet Home released in Japan in 1989 for Nintendo's Famicom, and received generally favorable reviews. The film's official trailer actually helped promote the game, and many reviewers thought the game was the better product.

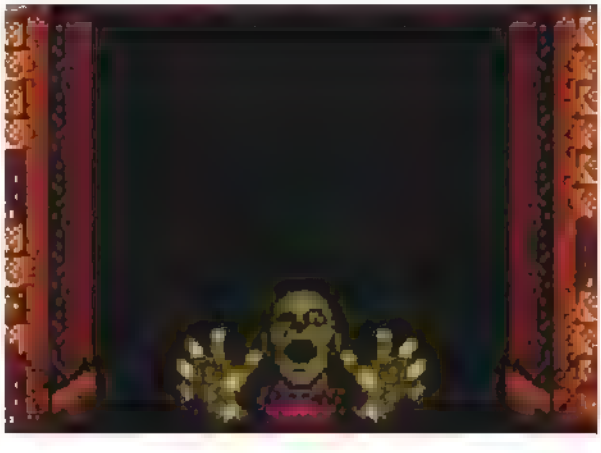
Black Market Release

In 2003, two groups of ROM hackers called Legal Protection and Suicidal Translations worked to translate all of Sweet Home's text into English. This translation of the game is still floating around on emulation message boards, and fans can buy copies of the game that have been uploaded onto actual NES carts via various grey-market websites. Legal Protections and Suicidal Translations spent more than a year finishing the project, and they were well aware of Sweet Home's influence on the industry. At one point in the game they took a scene that roughly translates, "You'll never know the secret to getting out of here," and translated it as "You cannot escape this house of terrifying evil!"

Unfortunately, RPGs had an unproven track record in the U.S. at the time, and Nintendo of America's stringent release guidelines showed preference for kid-friendly content, so Capcom decided against localizing the game for the NES in Western markets. Despite that decision, Sweet Home's legacy would be felt worldwide.

Years later, after the release of Sony's first PlayStation console, Fujiwara was still fond of his work on Sweet Home. Now a producer at Capcom, Fujiwara felt like it was time for the company to remake Sweet Home as a new franchise using updated console technology. He handed the project to a creative young director named Shinji Mikami.

Resident Evil – as it would come to be called – was groundbreaking for a lot of reasons and deserves its spot in gaming's hall of fame. However, many of Resident Evil's most iconic elements, including the mansion setting, multiple protagonists with specialized items, environmental puzzles, telling a story though scattered notes, item management with a limited inventory, and even the door loading screen are all on display in Sweet Home. Resident Evil – and the entire horror genre – owe a blood debt to this long-forgotten 8-bit game that had no right to be as good as it was. ◆



Real Or Bogus Pokémon News Stories?

With Pokémon Go being hailed as a cultural phenomenon, it has received a lot of mainstream media attention – but not all of it has been positive. Stories of spikes in car-crash statistics and players finding dead bodies have filled up the news feeds. The bizarre tales continue to surface without any sign of slowing down. Can you distinguish between what is a real news story and what isn't? Test your Pokémon Go news coverage knowledge below with our quiz.

1. Two Canadian teens accidentally cross U.S. border illegally while playing Pokémon Go.
   A. Real
   B. Fake

2. Woman gets stuck in tree and has to call 911 while searching for Pokémon in cemetery.
   A. Real
   B. Fake

3. Fireman catches Squirtle while putting out apartment fire, becomes viral internet sensation.
   A. Real
   B. Fake

4. New York authorities prevent 3,000 registered sex offenders on parole from playing Pokémon Go.
   A. Real
   B. Fake

5. Justin Bieber publicly states that he wishes Pokémon existed so they could enjoy his music, hopes they would be Beliebers.
   A. Real
   B. Fake

6. Police officer fails to catch armed robbers because a Snorlax shows up.
   A. Real
   B. Fake

7. Man crashes into a cop car because he was playing Pokémon Go, and it was all caught on camera.
   A. Real
   B. Fake

8. A man from Massachusetts is surprised to find his home has become a gym.
   A. Real
   B. Fake

9. Florida Gov. Rick Scott declares July 6, the date the game launched, an official state holiday.
   A. Real
   B. Fake

10. Some teens make the dubious decision to search for Pokémon in caves 100 feet underground and have to be rescued by authorities.
    A. Real
    B. Fake

11. Woman who can't swim nearly drowns in river whilst attempting to catch Magikarp.
    A. Real
    B. Fake

12. Vicious bar brawl in North Dakota breaks out between Team Instinct and Team Valor players, causing over $10,000 worth of damage.
    A. Real
    B. Fake

13. Non-governmental agency in Bosnia warns Pokémon Go players in region that they are at risk of stepping on land mines from the 1990s.
    A. Real
    B. Fake

14. An online service named PokéDates launches, with the goal of connecting Pokémon Go players.
    A. Real
    B. Fake

15. Two men fall off a cliff of 75 to 100 feet while playing the game in California, and sustain injuries.
    A. Real
    B. Fake

ANSWERS: 1A 2A 3B 4A 5B 6B 7A 8A 9B 10A 11B 12B 13A 14A 15A

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